健速
Takehaya
六畳間の侵略者!?
17

六畳間の侵略者!? 17
「ティア……あなたは本当に優しい子ね……」
「娘が母親の幸せを願うのは、当たり前ではありませんか」

海水浴
肝試し
夏祭り
二度目の夏はイベント盛りだくさん！

「おじさん、誰？」
父、襲来!?

Up Until Now, and From Now On

PART 1

Wednesday, August 4

The summer sun was mercilessly shining down from above. With this fine weather, the skin of those who walked under this shining sun gradually tanned. Normally this was a situation you'd get sick of, but it didn't seem like these people felt that way based on their expressions. In fact it was the opposite. They had dazzling bright smiles. It was very similar to the sparkling clear sea in front of them.

“Yahooo! It's the sea!”

Sanae threw off the parka she had been wearing, revealing the swimsuit beneath and cheerfully began running towards the sea. Each step she took shook the many frills on her swimsuit. She had been eagerly awaiting this day, and couldn't hold it in any longer as she spotted the sea.

“Sanae, wait. You have to exercise before you get in.”

However, there was someone that doused that burning urge of hers. That someone was Koutarou who had come to the beach together with her. After Sanae had run off two or three steps, Koutarou grabbed her arm and stopped her. That was common sense to someone athletic like Koutarou.

“Okay. I'll have her do it!”

“Ah!?”

However, Koutarou had only be able to capture her body and half her soul, as Sanae-chan's soul slipped out and continued towards the beach.

“Geez, that girl...”

Koutarou stared at her back with a wry smile.

“I'm... sorry.”

The left behind body and other half of the soul, Sanae-san, dropped her shoulders and apologized to Koutarou. Though it looked like the two had split, they were essentially the same person. Sanae-san was well aware that her feelings of being carried away appeared on the surface of Sanae-chan and her face turned red with embarrassment.

“Well, she's at least matured a little seeing as she left you behind.”

Koutarou knew that nothing would come from scolding Sanae-san. Being somewhat of an introvert, being overly strict with Sanae-san would only have the opposite effect.

“Thank you very much. Uhm, K-Koutarou-san, I will do my best to make up for Sanae-chan.”

With her face beet red, Sanae-san desperately spoke. Sanae-chan had been drilling into Sanae-san that when they were at the beach, she should be actively speaking to Koutarou. That was also the reason why she had switched from calling him Satomi-san to calling him Koutarou-san.

“Don't worry. She'll be right back anyways.”

“Eh!?”

Sanae-san's heart almost stopped, as she thought that her promise with Sanae-chan had been found out.

“Koutarou! Koutarou! The beach is boring without a body! I can't touch the water!”

“See?”

“Aha, ahahaha.”

But fortunately, Koutarou had no idea about their promise. Sanae-san laughed with relief.

Koutarou had come to the sea to play with his friends. The group consisted of Koutarou, the nine invaders, Kenji and the five members of the cosclub as well as the two haniwas. With this many, just setting up blankets and parasols was quite the workload.

“Well, that should do it.”

After setting up his fifth parasol, Koutarou decided to rest. That was when something cold was pressed up against his cheek.

“Uwoah!?”

“Good work, Koutarou.”

“Thank you for your efforts, Master.”

Theia and Ruth called out to Koutarou after surprising him with that sudden chill. Theia was wearing an elegant, white swimsuit, while Ruth was wearing a simple yet cute swimsuit. The chill on

Koutarou's cheek was a cooled plastic bottle that Theia had pressed onto him.

“Oh, it's just you Theia. Don't scare me like that.”

“Fufun. Even that is part of my affection. Just accept it.”

“You just felt like playing a prank, didn't you?”

Koutarou accepted the bottle while sending a suspicious glance at Theia. She responded with a smile rather than apologizing.

“You could say that... Koutarou, you've gradually started understanding your lord's feelings.”

“I'm not complimenting you. I'm dumbfounded.”

Koutarou removed the bottle's cap as she stared at Theia.

Theia had brought Koutarou's beloved cola. Not the diet kind, but the normal sugar one. That was the flavor he preferred.

“Master, I'm sorry for surprising you.”

Ruth bowed her head, blushing slightly.

“No, that's okay, Ruth-san.”

Koutarou was confused as to why Ruth was bowing, but Theia soon told him that reason.

“Koutarou, why are you only forgiving Ruth? That was her suggestion.”

The truth was that it was Ruth that had come up with the idea of pressing the bottle up against Koutarou's cheek. Theia frowned as only she was criticized, being the direct perpetrator.

“That's...”

“Your Highness, the truth is that Master has also forgiven you. But since he is a man he is being stubborn.”

“Koutarou, is that true?”

Theia's eyes opened wide and she looked up at Koutarou's face.

“U-Uhm...”

Koutarou stumbled for an answer. It was just like Ruth said, but it was difficult admitting that in this situation. So instead of answering the question he purposefully started drinking the contents of the bottle.

“Ahhh~, that's the taste I want.”

The chilled cola moistened his throat while the carbonic acid stimulated it. While he had only drunk it to get out of his predicament, the cola was very welcome after having setup the parasols and blankets.

“Your Highness.”

“Yes... fufufu.”

“Hihi.”

Looking at Koutarou, Theia and Ruth began giggling, and having gotten embarrassed, Koutarou took another sip of cola.

“Koutarou give some to me too.”

Theia shoved her open hands towards Koutarou. She had been in a bad mood just a moment ago, but now she was in high spirits as she looked up at Koutarou with a refreshing smile.

“...Did you buy this because you wanted to drink it yourself?”

“That's not true. It was out of pure goodwill. But... a true relationship between master and servant is one where you can share everything.”

“...You only become a princess when it really suits you.”

“Of course. I'm your princess after all.”

When Theia said that she seemed very happy and proud.

What she’s saying hasn’t actually changed all that much since we first met, but...

In the past Koutarou probably would have objected at Theia's words. However, now those words moved him for some reason. While they were the same words, the feelings within were completely different.

“Okay, okay.”

Having given up, Koutarou handed the bottle over to Theia. There, Theia then passed it along to Ruth.

“Here, you drink too.”

“Your Highness?”

“Koutarou is not my only vassal.”

“...”

Ruth hesitated a moment after hearing Theia's words and looked at Koutarou's face.

“Then I'll have some.”

Waiting for Koutarou to nod, she put her lips on the bottle and started drinking. The cola in the bottle gradually decreased as she sipped on it. It was a far more elegant way of drinking than compared to Koutarou.

“Thank you very much, Your Highness, Master.”

After quenching her thirst a little, Ruth returned the bottle to Theia. Not only was the way she drank elegant, but so was the amount.

“Indeed, then it's my turn.”

Unlike Ruth, Theia didn't hesitate to put her lips on the bottle. Her way of drinking was also more dynamic than Ruth's.

However, the childish way she gulped the cola down gave off an impression of a baby drinking milk from its bottle.

“Don't drink all of it.”

“...Haah. I know. Here.”

After drinking some of the cola, Theia returned the bottle to Koutarou. There was still enough left for him to drink. What Theia had said about sharing hadn't been a lie.

“I don't know of any princesses that hands over half drunk drinks though.”

“Fufu, but of course.”

“Hmm?”

“You and I aren't just simple master and servant after all.”

Theia placed her hands above her chest and smiled at Koutarou as she slightly tilted her head. Her smile and eyes were filled with confidence and trust, and just behind Theia was Ruth with the same expression. It was clear that Theia's words were also Ruth's words.

“...You really are unfair.”

Koutarou showed a bitter smile as he drank the cola again. The cool cola felt great as it passed through his dry throat. However, since Koutarou was distracted by the smiles of these two girls that sensation didn't remain within him for long.

As Sanae noticed Theia and Ruth, she invited them over to exercise together with her. Sanae, who wanted to jump into the water as quickly as possible, and Theia, who loved moving her body, soon came to an agreement. Of course, Ruth didn't have any objections and the three of them lined up to exercise.

“Make sure you stretch properly.”

“I know, I know. Right, Theia?”

“We aren't children, you may trust in us.”

“Well, with Ruth-san with you, you'll probably be fine.”

“Please leave it to me, Master.”

Koutarou glanced at the three girls in the corner of his eyes as he unloaded their luggage under the shadow of the parasols. Apart from Koutarou, the other 15 had left their luggage on the beach to go change. Luggage for 16 people was quite an amount, and Koutarou had to run back and forth between the luggage and parasols several times.

“Let me help you.”

That was when the fourth girl appeared and offered to help Koutarou. It was Kiriha, wearing a large t-shirt above her swimsuit. Since the t-shirt belonged to Koutarou, it concealed her curvy lines beneath it.

“That'll help... hey.”

“Hm?”

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing special. I just wanted to try showing an expression of my love before helping.”

Instead of carrying luggage, Kiriha embraced Koutarou from behind. She was neither hugging him too tightly or easily. And if Koutarou wanted to shake her off he could easily do so.

“Stop it. What if someone's watching?”

“Don't worry. I've made sure to look.”

Kiriha pressed her cheek against Koutarou's back and closed her eyes. A smile appeared on her lips as she was so happy to be able to do this that she couldn't help it.

“That's not what I meant.”

“If you hate me then just say so.”

“I'm troubled because I don't hate you.”

“I see. That's good enough of a reason to stop.”

Upon hearing the word troubled, Kiriha easily gave up and let go of Koutarou. Because of his experience from childhood he had a tendency to avoid deep relationships with others. While it was a problem that needed to be solved eventually, nothing good would come from forcing it right now. Troubling Koutarou wasn't Kiriha's intentions, and besides, she had been able to draw out that he didn't hate her, so she was satisfied.

“Please don't surprise attack me.”

“Fufufu, that's what invasions are all about.”

Kiriha laughed with a mischievous expression. The other day, Kiriha had declared that she would invade Koutarou's life. Ever since, she had shown direct expressions of love such as this. However, she didn't want others to feel unpleasant by it, so she made sure to choose the right time and place for it.

“It's bad for my heart.”

“You'll get used to it eventually. I intend to remain in your life after all.”

“Kiriha-san, you're really at your worst right now.”

“I am aware of that.”

Kiriha laughed for a while before picking up her own luggage. She was finally going to help Koutarou like she had said.

“But... I really don't have any intentions of troubling you or the others.”

“I know that too. That's why please stop being so sudden.”

“Fufufu, do you really understand what that means?”

“Eh?”

“It means that it's only a matter of time.”

“...Geez... It's even worse since you're doing it on purpose...”

Koutarou didn't have any effective counters to Kiriha's invasion. In fact, he had countless reasons to hug her right back.

“That's what invaders are.”

In the past, Kiriha had said that if you realized you were being invaded right away and could easily find countermeasures then it was nothing but child's play. And she was right now in the middle of such an invasion.

PART 2

With Kiriha's help, moving the luggage was done in a short moment. Despite having finished their work, Kiriha was still smiling next to Koutarou. They were currently sitting in the shade of one of the parasols. Koutarou was currently taking a break, having gotten tired from all his work and Kiriha was accompanying him.

“Satomi-sa~n! Kiriha-sa~n!”

That was when they could hear a voice calling out to them. When they turned to look in that direction they spotted Yurika wearing a cute pink swimsuit.

“Ugeh.”

Yurika tripped and fell face first into the sand but continued cheerfully running towards Koutarou and Kiriha.

“Are you okay, Yurika?”

“I'm fine. La la la~♪”

She then opened her bag that was under one of the parasols and pulled out her luggage from within. What she had pulled out was a life jacket, a float and large diving goggles. She couldn't swim whatsoever, so she had come fully equipped. As a result, her cute swimsuit could no longer be seen.

“With these I'm safe.”

“Yurika, is there even a point in swimming if you have to go that far?”

Koutarou couldn't understand Yurika's feelings for wanting to go swimming when she had to go so far. He felt like buying a life jacket was a waste of money, especially so for the poor Yurika.

“There is. The water is cold and feels great. Most of all, it's free unlike the pool.”

Yurika believed that an initial investment was necessary. Since swimming in the ocean was free, she could come as many times as she pleased.

“But that was expensive, right?”

“I'll be fine since Satomi-san will be supporting me for a while.”

Based on what Yurika said, one could imagine that she had used up all of her savings on that life jacket. Hearing that, Koutarou shouted in a stern voice.

“You idiot!! How many times do I have to tell you not to waste your money!?”

“So you're saying it's fine if I don't swim in the ocean?”

“Put some effort in learning how to swim!”

“That's not possible in the few days since we decided to go to the beach.”

“Koutarou, Yurika is more correct than you this time... you best support her for a while.”

“Ugh... I guess I have to...”

Thinking about it calmly, Koutarou also realized that Yurika was correct. It was impossible to learn how to swim in just a few days, and Yurika couldn't even get into the ocean without a float. Since that would just be far too sad, Koutarou decided that he would support Yurika for a while.

“Really!?”

“Just this once, get it?”

“Yes!”

Yurika happily nodded her head. She would be okay for a while now.

“Satomi-san, Satomi-san, let's eat fried corn!”

Yurika then put her hands together in front of her chest and looked up at Koutarou with sparkling eyes. On her way here, Yurika had spotted several stalls that had caught her interest. If Koutarou was going to support her, she would like to try eating them by all means.

“Don't get a full of yourself.”

A quick snapping sound could be heard.

“...I-I'm sorry... I got a little ahead of me...”

“As long as you understand.”

“Y-Yes.”

Yurika nodded as she held her forehead. Koutarou only hit enemies or those important to him. She was fine while he still hit her, but if she went too far he would eventually stop. Yurika wanted to avoid that at all costs.

“Also, you must exercise properly before you get into the sea.”

“Eeeehhh!? But I have a life jacket and float!!”

“That won't do. You'll need to practice little by little. You can't rely on tools forever.”

“Uuhh.”

Yurika hesitated. She was planning on relying on her tools, but when she thought about it again, she felt like it would be bad to completely rely on them. A magical girl in a life jacket and float was a bit too novel.

“Kiriha-san, could you alternate back and forth with me and teach Yurika how to swim?”

“I understand, I accept.”

Either Koutarou or Kiriha would be enough to teach Yurika, but if they did that one of them wouldn't be able to enjoy the beach. Taking turns was a more sensible way of doing it.

“I want to play too.”

“I know. You can do what you want the later half.”

“Are you sure!?”

“Yeah.”

Koutarou wasn't a devil, and he would keep her practice to the first half of the day. Besides, they should have some time where they could play together.

“Then let's go, Nijino Yurika.”

“Already!?”

“The sooner we can start, the sooner we can stop.”

“Okay. I'll try my best.”

“That's more like it.”

Kiriha took Yurika with her and headed towards the ocean. Compared to before, Yurika seemed more ambitious. Her continuous study with Koutarou had an effect on this part of her.

PART 3

As Yurika and Kiriha headed to the ocean, Shizuka and Maki appeared to take their place. Since the two of them lived in room 206, they were often together. However, all Koutarou could see was Shizuka wearing a bikini and pareo. Maki who was with her was for some reason hiding behind in the shadow of the parasol.

“Aika-san, why are you getting embarrassed when you've come this far?”

“But, this kind of thing doesn't suit me...”

“It's fine. Satomi-kun won't mind.”

“Besides, this is the same as underwear.”

“...What now?”

Shizuka pulled on Maki's hand in an attempt to drag her in front of Koutarou. However, Maki was resisting and things weren't going as Shizuka hoped.

“You're surprisingly rebellious.”

“That's because I can't show myself in front of Satomi-kun wearing something as shameless as this!”

“Gee~z, Satomi-kun, it's hot but could you come out from under the parasol?”

“Y-Yeah...”

Unable to understand the situation, Koutarou held his head as he crept out from under the parasol.

“Be~hoo~ld.”

“Kya kya kya!?”

Crawling out from under the parasol, Koutarou could see Maki. She was wearing a swimsuit abundant with frills, but she was embarrassed at having Koutarou see her and she held her body and squatted.

She’s kinda cute...

Koutarou thought that Maki looked cute as he saw her. Not only did her cute swimsuit suit her well but her embarrassed mannerism added onto that.

“Look, look, Satomi-kun!! Isn't she cute!?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“You're lying! This doesn't suit me at all!”

“Why are you getting embarrassed over wearing a swimsuit you picked yourself?”

“There's a difference between buying one and wearing one!”

Maki seemed embarrassed from showing her skin to others and showed no signs of standing back up. With tears in her eyes she looked up at Koutarou and Shizuka. At first Koutarou stared at

Maki with bright feelings, but he eventually noticed the darkness in her eyes.

I see, Aika-san might...

Koutarou had an idea as to why that darkness was there. It was a large problem that originated from her upbringing. Because he felt like he couldn't leave her be like that, Koutarou boldly decided to ask her.

“Aika-san, could it be that it's not the swimsuit you're embarrassed over, but your scar?”

“...!?”

In that moment, Maki's expression froze over. Her eyes shot wide open, as if she was looking into the gates of hell. At the same time, her body trembled slightly. Seeing that, Koutarou realized that his imagination was correct.

“So that really was it.”

Maki had been born in the slums and had a tough childhood. She was sold to a slaver and grew up under abuse. After being saved from that she received training as a soldier. That's why her scars would show if she wore a swimsuit and exposed her skin. That's why her claims that it didn't suit her or that it was just like underwear were just excuses, the truth was she didn't want to show her scarred body. She feared that Koutarou would be disappointed if he saw that body of hers.

“D-Don't look, Satomi-kun. If you looked at this ugly, scarred body of mine, I'll...”

Small scars could be erased with magic. However, the larger ones and the scars in her heart couldn't be erased with magic. That's why she appealed to Koutarou with tears in her eyes.

“You're worried about strange things, Aika-san.”

Koutarou squatted down in front of Maki and smiled at her.

“Eh...”

“I look like this.”

Koutarou put his hands on his t-shirt and removed it, revealing his upper body. On his torso were all kinds of scars. The most of them were scars from his many fierce battles in the past Forthorthe, such as his burns and cuts he received from Alunaya and the wound from the assassin's blade. Having not erased his scars with magic, his scars stood out more than Maki's.

“Do you hate me after seeing these scars, Aika-san?”

“No, I don't! I love you the way you are right now!”

Maki hurriedly shook her head. Koutarou being scarred or not had no effect on her opinion of him.

“And I'm the same. It doesn't matter to me if you have scars or not.”

“Ah...”

Maki's expression stiffened. Koutarou was the same as Maki. There was a persuasive power behind his words. Maki's senses told her that Koutarou wasn't lying. Koutarou wasn't bothered by Maki's

scars. That truth gradually sank into Maki and as it did, the darkness in her expression was wiped away.

“So don't hide it. So what if you have scars?”

“...Satomi-kun, you're a boy so you don't understand a girl's worries.”

“Yeah. I don't understand, that's why it doesn't bother me.”

“...That might, be true...”

Maki quietly nodded at Koutarou's words. Slightly nervous, she slowly stood up and removed her arms concealing her scars, showing them to Koutarou.

“...Where's the scar?”

“Around here.”

“Ah, so this it! I see it now! ...But, I wouldn't have noticed if you hadn't said anything.”

“Eh...?”

Maki's eyes opened wide. Koutarou spoke how he felt.

“Normally, you don't press your face up towards a girl's stomach to take a good look. Besides, that scar isn't as clear as you think it is.”

Even though they were at the beach, it was bad manners staring at a girl's body. On top of that, Maki had erased her scars with magic so unless one paid really closed attention they wouldn't notice the

traces of her scar. A single red line was pretty much all that remained of a once large wound.

“Fufufu, I told you, Aika-san. Satomi-kun won't mind.”

Shizuka laughed as the results were exactly what she expected. Maki was bothered by her scar, being a girl and all, but Koutarou didn't mind whatsoever. Maki was simply over thinking things. Since Shizuka had anticipated that, Maki's reaction was heartwarming.

“If you can erase them that well, you should erase mine too the next time.”

Koutarou smiled and put his t-shirt back on. His scars were on the level that would surprise anyone who saw them, so he needed to conceal them. Since Kenji might spot them, he wanted to erase them if possible.

“...Okay, I will.”

“Make it cheap, okay?”

“Since I am the treasurer of Satomi's band of knights, I don't need any extra payment on top of my salary.”

“I see, that's a big help.”

“Fufu.”

Maki finally returned back to smiling. At the same time, she stretched out, and her embarrassment weakened. She was returning to her usual self.

“Isn't that great, Aika-san.”

Shizuka cheerfully smiled next to Maki.

“Y-Yes.”

Maki repeatedly nodded. Tears of relief formed in the corner of her eyes.

Looking at the two, Koutarou thought to himself.

Landlord-san is always looking after everyone else...

Shizuka was always thinking of everyone else, and since she had noticed the darkness in Maki's heart, she would often help her out. Seeing that, Koutarou felt honest admiration for Shizuka.

And Aika-san has started showing more expressions a normal girl would make...

Maki trusted Shizuka and had opened her heart up to her. Koutarou was happy to see the once isolated Maki walking forward, however awkward it might be.

Like that, Shizuka and Maki were both, for their own unique reasons, people that Koutarou couldn't take his eyes off.

“That's right, Satomi-kun. Why don't you say something to Aika-san. Her scar aside, this is the swimsuit she chose after serious consideration.”

“That cute look suits you well, Aika-san.”

“Hau...”

Hearing Koutarou's impressions, Maki embarrassingly balled up again. That was simple embarrassment from being seen in her swimsuit. It was different from before, this was her usual reaction, and Koutarou and Shizuka both had their usual smiles.

Part 4

The next ones to arrive were Harumi and Clan. These two were often together and today was no exception.

“Harumi, how does it feel walking on the sand?”

“It feels somewhat hard. It very easy to walk in, but it doesn't feel like I've come to the sea.”

“You can release the field around your hands during detailed work, but I might need to put in the ability to release the field around the feet as well.”

“I think there would be many cases where it would be needed, like playing the piano or other cultural things.”

The two were daily experimenting with Clan's invention, PAF, which was a barrier generation device that transformed in real-time. Since they had come to the beach, they figured they might as well do some experiments on the beach and underwater. The two had been later than the rest because of their preparations.

“Hey Clan, don't waste all of your time at the beach doing a bunch of research.”

“I know! Once I've set up the machines to collect data, I'll have Harumi play like normal.”

“I was talking about you too. I know you love research but you should exercise your body from time to time. It's unhealthy.”

“I guess it can't be helped...”

Clan was staring into a hologram projected from her bracelet, but she turned it off as Koutarou said so. He was right, but she still felt like continuing on her research. She stubbornly looked at her bracelet.

“Ahh~, so the citizens of Forthorthe will have an unhealthy empress. How sad...”

“Okay! I get it! You're always such a bully!”

Clan frowned and complained as she removed her bracelet. She was more upset with Koutarou than not being able to do any research. There, Harumi called out to Clan.

“Satomi-kun likes you, Clan-san.”

“I'm not having someone that plays around with me like me!”

“I love you, princess.”

“I'll kill you! I'll definitely kill you!”

“At least make it painless.”

“T-This man is.... Gaaahh!!”

Clan furiously stopped around the sand after being made fun of by Koutarou. Knowing that it was an expression of affection, Clan had nothing to take her anger out on.

“You... If you weren't the Blue Knight you would have been hanged a long time ago!”

“Don't lie. The way you are right now, you'd hesitate to kill even a clear enemy.”

“You really are a bully!”

“Hm...”

Harumi had watched over the two for a while, but she eventually reached a conclusion. And she slightly raised up her right leg with a big smile on her face.

“Ei.”

She then kicked the sand with her raised leg. The sand flew towards Koutarou and hit his legs.

“What are you doing, Sakuraba-senpai?”

Koutarou looked at Harumi with a perplexed look. He couldn't imagine that Harumi had purposefully kicked sand at him, so he must have had a bug on his leg or there had to be some other reason behind it.

“I'm just envious because you never bully me. Ei Ei!”

However, Harumi's objective was just to be mischievous towards Koutarou. Harumi was notably modest, but she had been influenced by the girls of room 106, and would very rarely show a playful side. Now was one of those times, as she kicked sand at Koutarou like a child.

“Envious...”

Koutarou instinctively smiled wryly. Harumi had said that she was envious but she looked strangely happy, and it certainly didn't look like she was feeling envious. If anything, it looked like she was using envy as an excuse to be mischievous.

“That's right, we should just bury this man.”

Clan joined in as well. Compared to Harumi, Clan kicked up even more sand, surely a sign of her discontent.

“I won't lose!”

With a flame lit in his juvenile mind, Koutarou decided to go on a counter offensive.

Thanks to Clan’s invention, there’s no need to worry about Sakuraba-senpai’s body. I can treat her the same as everyone else, and because of you, it’s gotten even easier. Thank you, Clan!

Koutarou was treating Harumi with extra care because he was worried about her body. However, thanks to Clan's invention and Forthorthe's medical advancements there was practically no reason to give her special treatment. Because Clan went along with Harumi's attacks, it was easier for him to attack back. So Koutarou thanked Clan from the bottom of his heart as he kicked sand with all his strength.

“Uryaaah!!”

The power of Koutarou's trained legs allowed him to shave off much of the sand beneath him. That sand then rained down on Harumi and Clan from above.

“Kya kya kya!”

“Buwah!?”

Being showered in sand, Harumi seemed somewhat happy, but Clan looked astonished. PAF protected Harumi from most of the sand, but Clan was completely bathed in it. As a result, she was completely covered in sand.

“...Ah, sorry, Clan.”

Seeing that, Koutarou felt a little bad and began brushing the sand off of Clan. As he did, Clan sent him a cold glance.

“Bertorion, just what do you think a princess of Forthorthe is?”

“Hmm... maybe a good playmate?”

“Then take better care of me.”

“I thought I was.”

“I don't know about that.”

Clan's face turned red as she allowed Koutarou to brush away the sand. Whether that red face was from anger or embarrassment remained a mystery even to Clan herself.

“Fufufu, but he is properly taking care of you.”

However, since Harumi was smiling, she realized that she was indeed blushing.

PART 5

Kenji had been out buying additional ice to put in the cooler. Having lost to Koutarou in rock paper scissors, he had to take up that job. The five members of the cosclub joined him. Since they had brought their cosplay outfits with them, they brought less food and drinks.

“Mackenzie, that's what you get for acting cool.”

“Shut it! How can I refuse when my senpais asks me to carry it!”

“You're soft but for some reason you still think you're well trained. Anyways, drink this and rest up.”

“Ah, thanks.”

Having bought ice and returned to the beach, Kenji was lying spread out under a parasol. Since he hadn't just carried the ice but also the luggage of the five girls from the cosclub he had used even more stamina. Kenji was currently resting, drinking the water out of the bottle he had gotten from Koutarou. By the way, the cosclub girls had already met up with the girls of room 106 and were currently playing. So Koutarou and Kenji were the only ones still around the parasols.

“I'm going to go play with everyone else. You should come too once you've recovered.”

“...That's unusual, Kou.”

Koutarou was about to leave the shadow of the parasols, but stopped as he heard Kenji speak. He felt something serious in the

words he had spoken. When Koutarou turned back to look, Kenji had risen his body and was looking at him.

“You actually getting along well with others is... it's something I can't imagine the past you doing.”

“Mackenzie...”

“You used to reject others before your relationship reached a certain point. The past you wouldn't have come to the beach if you got an offer.”

“That... might be true.”

Koutarou obediently nodded. He almost hadn't last year. Kenji took a sip of water to refresh himself and stared at Koutarou.

“Kou, what happened between you and those girls?”

“That's...”

Kenji didn't have his usual gentle smile. He was staring straight at Koutarou with a serious expression. Kenji knew everything about Koutarou. Since half-assed excuses wouldn't work, Koutarou would tell him part of the truth.

“Since this is about their personal life I can't go into details, but... something like what happened between you and I happened between me and them.”

“I see. So that's why...”

There, Kenji finally showed a smile and nodded repeatedly. Koutarou's short explanation was enough for him. The reason for

that was that Kenji had gotten an understanding of who Koutarou was after several fierce collisions between them. At the same time, Koutarou had accepted Kenji for who he was. That's why, hearing that the same thing had happened between Koutarou and the girls was enough for Kenji to understand. While he didn't know the details, he realized that the essence was the same.

“That's too bad. I was after one of the girls in that group, but if something like that happened, I'll have to give up.”

Kenji returned to his usual self. He had his normal gentle smile as he looked at the girls.

“If you're serious I don't mind. I like them, but... it's not like I'm going out with them. Besides... I have nothing to worry about if you're serious.”

However, Koutarou still had a serious expression.

Koutarou had sworn to make sure the invading girls lived a happy life. If possible, he wanted to make that happen on his own, but he realized that would be difficult. Koutarou wasn't that selfish, nor was he that much of an idealist.

Moreover, if he had to leave something he couldn't do himself, Kenji was ideal. To Koutarou, Kenji was just as special to him as the girls of room 106. Since the first one to save him had been Kenji, in one way, he trusted Kenji more than himself. That said, that only applied when Kenji was serious.

“And if I wasn't serious?”

“I'd beat the crap out of you.”

“You answered that one without missing a beat, Kou. Haha, I'm scared, so I'll wait until you make your decision.”

“Mackenzie...”

“Kou, don't get scared and run away, okay? You can only walk forward.”

“I know, thanks.”

“Yeah.”

Kenji took another sip of water and laid back down under the parasol. Having had a direct talk with Koutarou he was a little embarrassed about looking at him after they were done talking.

“Then I'm going.”

“Yeah. I'll see you later.”

The same was true for Koutarou. That's why he turned his back towards Kenji and headed towards the girls. However, this was just a temporary thing as the next time they meet they would be back to normal.

PART 6

Koutarou and the others had all gone to swim in the ocean at first, but after some time they all began enjoying the beach in their own ways. Since there were 16 humans and two haniwas there were all kinds of ways to enjoy the beach.

“Clan. You seem out of breath, are you okay?”

“I-I'm fine!! I can't admit defeat yet!!”

“Satomi-kun, I'll make up for Clan-san.”

“I'm counting on you, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Koutarou was in the middle of playing beach volleyball. There were three people on each team, and the first one to ten points would win. His teammates were Clan and Harumi. Since Clan wanted to confirm the movements of her invention that Harumi was wearing, the two naturally ended up in the same team. However, since Harumi had a weak constitution and Clan suffered from a severe lack of exercising, Koutarou was added into the their team to balance things out.

“I thought Kou would give up around now.”

“They're doing better than I thought.”

“Yeah, Sakuraba-senpai can move her body pretty well when she's feeling good.”

The opposing team consisted of Kenji, Theia and Shizuka. Kenji was almost even with Koutarou, but the girls on this team were overwhelmingly active. As a result, team Kenji had the advantage. Surprisingly it wasn't as one-sided of a game as it should have been thanks to Harumi. Having recovered from her handicap thanks to PAF, she served as a good partner to Koutarou. The majority of team Koutarou's points were from a combination attack from these two.

“Here I go, Mackenzie!”

“Bring it! It's about time we end this!”

“I...”

Koutarou threw the ball up into the air.”

“...won't let you!!”

He then pulled off a daring jump serve. Because the ball was big and soft it didn't pick up that much speed and Theia entered a receiving position as the ball fell towards her.

“Mackenzie!”

Theia used her whole body to kill the ball's momentum and passed it to Kenji.

Kenji tossed the ball upwards. Kenji was about as athletic as Koutarou, though in a slightly different way, and his toss drew a beautiful parabola and started falling down in front of the net.

“Leave it to me, Mackenzie-kun!”

Shizuka rushed up to the ball. She chased after the ball with her eyes as she kicked off of the sand. Reaching the highest point of her jump she smashed the falling ball with all of her might.

Being athletic, her smash had about as much power behind it as a boy's would. The small Theia swiftly received the balls, Kenji then dexterously tossed it up for Shizuka to smash. This was team Kenji's pattern for victory.

“I won't let you!!”

At that time, Koutarou jumped up on the other side of the net in an attempt to block. His timing was spot on, but because Shizuka had just barely changed the direction of her smash it only ended up hitting his arm. The ball had lost a lot of its momentum because of that imperfect block and it slowly fell down in front of Clan.

“Wah, ooohh!”

Clan's legs were getting numb from her exhaustion but she barely managed keep the ball in play with one of her hands. However, having received it with a single hand, the ball flew in a direction where no one was at, but Harumi quickly chased after it.

“Satomi-kun!”

Thanks to PAF's assistance, Harumi could move her body better than the average girl. As a result she was barely able to get a toss up as she slid across the sand.

“Make iiitt!!”

Koutarou had just recovered after landing, and Harumi's toss flew in a straight line. He didn't have any time to spare unlike with a normal toss. Just reaching out towards the flying ball was all he had time to do.

Koutarou was barely able to reach the ball and forced it into a different direction. The ball had been flying upwards, but thanks to Koutarou it changed direction downwards, and as a result the ball returned to team Kenji's side in the form of a quick attack.

“Not going to happen!”

Theia lowered her posture and thrust herself towards the ball. Having decided that she wouldn't make it by running she threw herself instead, with her arm reached out, sliding across the sand.

However, Theia was just a fist's length away as the ball hit the sand. Theia's small size had worked against her. After bouncing once on the sand the ball landed once more and rolled off.

“Alright!!”

“We did it!?”

“Yes! We've closed the gap by one point, Clan-san!”

Seeing the ball rolling on the sand, Koutarou and the others erupted into joy. While it was partially thanks to good luck, their joy was still great as they scored while losing.

“Kuh, you're pretty good, Koutarou!”

Theia frustratingly punched the sand once before getting up and brushing the sand on her away. Since she had planned on winning without giving them any more points, she was mortified. Having mentally matured to the point where wasn't concerned with winning or losing, she still went for the win in games as long as it didn't bother anyone. Theia was currently all fired up to defeat team Koutarou no matter what.

“We won't lose that easily. Clan and senpai are different from before.”

“Let's do our best, Clan-san.”

“I guess I have too... I'll come up with a plan.”

While the opposing team had the lead, Koutarou and the others had no intentions of losing. Koutarou, Clan and Harumi were all trying their hardest to win this match. The chances of winning was low, and it wasn't like they would get anything for winning, but it was fun. This time they spent together with their friends during the summer was irreplaceable.

In the end, the beach volleyball match ended with team Koutarou losing. Just after they had scored their eight point, team Kenji scored their tenth and ended the game. At one point there had been a five point difference, so they had worked considerably to pull it back to a two point difference.

“It was a close call.”

“What a shame.”

“This is a disgrace.”

Koutarou and the others were sitting down near the beach volleyball court. While believing they had put up a good fight, they still dropped their shoulders in defeat. The three were now looking at team Kenji currently in another match. Since the winners stayed, they were now facing the cosclub. Because of the difference in ability, all five of the cosclub members were on the court. But even then, team Kenji had the advantage.

“Clan. I hope you learn from this and start getting a little more exercise.”

“That won't happen, I'm too busy with research.”

“I feel bad for the citizen's of Forthorthe. Their empress will be—”

“Don't bring that up again!”

“Clan-san, why don't we exercise together? I think it would be easy for both me and you to build up our physical strength with this... uhm, PAF.”

“I guess it can't be helped... I'll go with you.”

“That's good... eyup.”

Having finished talking with Harumi and Clan, Koutarou stood up. The remaining two looked up at Koutarou with perplexed looks.

“What's the matter?”

“Don't you remember, I made a bet with Mackenzie. The loser would go buy drinks.”

“Oh yeah, I remember you betting on something like that.”

Before the match, Koutarou and Kenji had made a bet. The leader of the losing team would have to go buy drinks for the winning team. Koutarou was about to go fulfill that promise.

“But considering how he's faring, he might have already forgotten.”

“Maybe, but that would be boring, right?”

“How honest...”

“I'm actually shocked to hear you say that.”

Koutarou smiled wryly and dropped his shoulders.

“Eh?”

“Clan-san, Satomi-kun is a knight.”

Clan didn't understand Koutarou's intentions right away, but Harumi let her in on it. Because of that, she realized her own failings and sighed.

“Phew... then you better hurry up and fulfill your promise, Reios Fatra Bertorion.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Koutarou somewhat jokingly saluted Clan and Harumi before leaving the two behind and heading for a beach shop.

Part 7

Heading towards the shop from the beach volleyball court, Koutarou could see the girls of room 106 that hadn't participated in the volleyball. The first ones he spotted were Sanae and Maki, who were the closest to the court. The two had jumped into the ocean and were swimming together.

“Maki, you said this was your first time coming to the sea but you can actually swim.”

“Ah, that's thanks to these two.”

“It's Karama Ho-!”

“It's Korama Ho-!”

“What do they have to do with it?”

“We are quietly supporting her underwater Ho-”

“It's jet propulsion Ho-!”

“That sounds fun! Let me borrow them, I can settle for just Karama-chan too!”

“Sure. I'm starting to get used to it, so I think I'll be fine with one.”

“Karama, let's have a showdown Ho!”

“I accept Ho!”

“Alright, then let's race to that island!”

“Let's go Ho-!”

“Maximum power Ho-!”

“Wah, awawa, you're, you're too fast!!”

Sanae and Maki borrowed the haniwas powers to swim at speeds beyond human abilities. The two had been right next to Koutarou at first, but in the blink of an eye they were far away from everyone else. The others were as small as ants here. Koutarou had worried for the two at first, but then he remembered that they were an ex-ghost and an ex-evil magical girl and forgot about his worries.

PART 8

“You're fine now, Ruth.”

“Really, Kiriha-sama?”

“Yes. The problem is Yurika.”

“Ptui... ptui... Kiriha-san, water flows into my mouth whenever I open it.”

“Only open it when your head's above water.”

“But that's hard.”

The remaining three, Kiriha, Ruth and Yurika were in the middle of practicing how to swim. Kiriha was acting as the teacher for the other two. The serious and earnest Ruth was already getting a hang of it, but Yurika was not good at all. Yurika was practically just

swinging her arms and legs around, and it seemed like it would take quite a while more until she learns how to swim.

“It might be best if you see how you look like when you swim.”

“Then I'll record it.”

“Eehh~, you don't have to do that. I'm properly swimming.”

“I'm saying this because you're not. Ruth, please.”

Kiriha limited her guiding to Yurika alone. Ruth operated an unmanned scout and used it to record Yurika's appearance when swimming. Since Yurika wasn't aware of how awkward she was swimming, Kiriha needed to get her to understand first.

Good, everyone seems to be having fun...

Seeing the girls having fun made Koutarou happy. He felt better knowing that despite shouldering many hardships, they could at least spend some peaceful time together right now.

All that’s left is for me to enjoy myself as well...

With nothing else to worry about, Koutarou should enjoy himself too. Just like he worried for the girls, the girls surely worried for him. If he didn't seem like he was having fun they would worry. Koutarou decided to enjoy his stay at the beach, not just for his own sake but for the girls as well.

The shop Koutarou had gone to buy drinks at was brand new but its design was old-fashioned. It was beautiful, and the shop had a typical cluttered atmosphere. As a result, it was more popular with the women than the other shops around the beach were.

“Welcome to the beach shop, Hunters!”

“Come on in. What do you need?”

“Y-You guys!?”

“Oh, you're Kiriha-neesan's friend!”

“Koutarou-kun. It's been a while.”

The ones that greeted Koutarou at the storefront was the ghost hunter duo he had met several times before. They had been enemies at first, but they had been a big help during the incident with Sanae. He also heard that they had played a big part during the underground incident. Because of that, Koutarou no longer had any hostility towards them.

“What are you guys doing here?”

“Business! We're going to make a fortune off this beach shop!”

The two had started up a beach shop business using the money they had gotten from Kiriha. While they didn't have orders from Kiriha, they were operating as ghost hunters, chasing down evil spirits. But it wasn't like they always had access to information regarding ghosts. When that happened, their income stagnated and they began worrying for their future. So they turned their attention to a beach shop. They set up shop on a popular beach and sold their products off with a high margin. They needed to earn enough during the summer to keep them going during the off seasons.

“Don't sell at too high of a price okay?”

“We know. We've got it all planned out.”

“We want to avoid troubles too. This shop is also functioning as a training place for the People of the Earth.”

“Training place? What do you mean?”

“Why don't you take a look around you?”

“Ah, are they all underground people!?”

This shop had several employees, and many of them were wearing familiar, traditional Japanese clothing. It was the costumes the People of the Earth wore.

“That's right. The underground people receive vocational training before they're sent up to the surface.”

“This is one of the facilities for that. We want extra help and the underground people need practice. It's a give and take situation.”

“Hmm... looks like you've put a lot of thought into this.”

In a beach shop, customers wouldn't come back time and time again. Most of the time they only come once per season. As a result, even if there were a few mistakes it wouldn't develop into a series of troubles. It was a good place to train without inhibitions. Moreover, the hunters mansion was nearby, so there were no problems with lodging for the employees. In that sense, this was an optimal training facility.

“By the way, everyone in this shop will be acting as ghosts during your test of courage tonight.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It was a direct request from Nee-san herself.”

“Aniki, are you sure we should tell him that?”

“If we don't, we'll be done in by those extreme children. This is Kiriha-Nee-san we're talking about, it's likely she won't say anything herself.”

“Yeah. I haven't heard anything about this.”

“...I thought so. I'm glad we met here then. That could have been dangerous.”

The hunter dropped his shoulders and Koutarou smiled wryly as he nodded.

“I'll try to let them know not to use weapons or something else.”

“That would be a great help! I'll give you extra service!”

“So I'll get a discount?”

“I can't do that, but you can take the unsold stuff with you.”

“That would be great, we have a lot of people. I'll happily accept.”

After getting the drinks plus some extras, Koutarou once again looked around the shop. The People of the Earth were already moving towards their goal. Kiriha's wish had started taking form. Seeing the People of the Earth in training, Koutarou was able to actually feel that. He also felt proud knowing this was what they had protected.

PART 9

After eating dinner, Koutarou and the others headed out to hold a test of courage according to plan. The test would start in the inn's backyard, from there they would climb up a mountain path for a while before reaching the goal, an old European-styled mansion. There were rumors that real ghosts wandered the area around that mansion, and it was a famous horror spot amongst the locals. It was perfect for a test of courage.

“One of those ghosts is already here though.”

“But that ghost isn't mortified at all since Koutarou brought it with him himself. Ehehe~”

The old European-styled mansion in question was the place where the ghost hunters had taken Sanae in the past. It was currently being used as lodgings for the employees of the beach shop, but it was without a doubt a fact that ghosts had appeared. It was a genuine horror spot.

“Ah, maybe I should be on the side scaring people.”

“Just give it up. It'll just become a mess later.”

However, neither Koutarou nor Sanae were scared of ghosts. Koutarou already knew the truth behind this test of courage, and Sanae had experience from when she was a ghost herself. The two felt like they were taking a casual hike.

“By the way, Ruth, what is a test of courage?”

“I'm not very well informed myself, but it's supposedly a game to prove your courage by heading into a place where ghosts appear.”

“Oh... in other words, it's kind of like a small scale version of my trial.”

“Most likely.”

Theia and Ruth weren't very scared of ghosts. They had spent a lot of time together with Sanae, and they also had a tolerance to the wonders of the world, being aliens that had travelled across the stars.

“I don't want to test my courage!”

“It's okay, Yurika-san. I've prepared this shrine maiden cosplay just for that reason.”

“That's right! It's the president's masterpiece!”

“Real ghosts won't run away from cosplay!”

“It's okay, it's okay.”

“Noooooooo!!”

Unlike the first four, Yurika was completely terrified. She was still scared of ghosts and was reluctant to join the test of courage. If the five members of the cosclub hadn't caught her, she would have run away somewhere.

“Aika-san, is it hard to defeat ghosts?”

“That depends on the ghost's core. Even I can easily deal with normal wandering or bound spirits, but when it comes to divine-level spirits like Sanae-san it requires a magician specialized in

spiritual magic to prepare thoroughly with many rituals to even have a chance."

"Hmm... I wonder if uncle's powers would be enough."

"If you don't mind increasing in weight, I should be able to deal with anything just before a divine-level spirit."

"Absolutely not."

"I thought so."

If a ghost appeared, Shizuka and Maki were thinking of exorcising it. Shizuka could use the Fire Dragon Emperor's spiritual energy and magical power, and Maki could use her own magic. It was impossible for a normal ghost to scare the two of them.

"Clan-san, what do you think of ghosts?"

"In the past I thought of them as unscientific, but as of late I've begun thinking of them as an interesting subject of research."

Harumi and Clan had an awfully neutral reaction, neither are afraid of ghosts nor intending to exorcise them. With Alaia's memories, Harumi wouldn't be shaken by ghosts, but with her gentle personality she didn't think of exorcising them either. Moreover, Clan thought of ghosts as a potential research subject and was aware of the risks. As a result, she might capture any ghosts but she wouldn't exorcise them nor fear them.

"...Kurano-san, everyone seems to be having fun."

"I told you the girls are more tolerant when it comes to horror stuff. Fufufu."

Apart from Yurika and some of the cosclub members, nobody was really scared, apart from Kenji. He looked like he was progressive but the truth of the matter was that he was an old-fashioned type and he was bad with ghosts and horror related themes. Kiriha who was smiling at him made use of spiritual energy technology and knew that ghosts existed in reality. However, she didn't especially fear them and continued her act.

“I hate incomprehensible things like ghosts.”

“Girls are more vague after all... well then.”

Kiriha smiled at Kenji once more before stepping in front of the group with a small box in hand. She was in charge of this test of courage.

“It's about time that we split into teams. Everyone, please draw a lot from this box.”

Following Kiriha's instructions, Koutarou and the others drew a lot from the box one at a time.

In total there were 16 of them. This group would be split into teams of three through lottery. That would leave one over, but that was Kiriha herself. Being in charge of this event, she would tag along with the last team to set off to confirm that no problems had occurred.

“I'm... oh, I'm with Sakuraba-senpai and Clan.”

Kiriha had also arranged the lottery so that Clan and Harumi would be in the same team. They had been excluded from the lottery. Since there were still concerns about Harumi's body, it was preferable if she and Clan were on the same team.

That's why only 13 people actually drew lots, and the one Koutarou drew had 'Clan & Harumi's team' written on it instead of a number.

“Welcome, Satomi-kun.”

“I won't welcome you, Bertorion.”

“Oh.”

Harumi welcomed Koutarou with a smile but Clan turned away from him. She still had a grudge for what happened during the day.

“Satomi-kun, it's because you tease her too much.”

“When I'm dealing with Clan, I just let my guard down and inadvertently say too much.”

“I think it's best if you apologize to her.”

“I think I will... Clan.”

“What?”

Clan finally turned around to face Koutarou. Behind her classic glasses were eyes full of grudge staring at him.

“I'm sorry about before.”

“Have you properly reflected on your actions?”

“Yeah. But. This is pretty hard.”

“What is?”

“You get angry if I'm treating you too rough but you also get angry if I completely treat you like a princess.”

“W-We've known each other for a long time, so learn how much to hold back!”

“I am trying. So at least forgive me if I mess up once in awhile.”

“...I-I guess I have to...”

Clan wanted Koutarou to recognize her as a princess, but at the same time, she was Koutarou's partner and didn't want him to treat her like a princess. In other words, she wanted him to tread a fine line, and that fine line would sometimes not line up with Koutarou's perception. Moreover, Clan knew that her demands were a bit contradicting and she decided to forgive Koutarou.

“Satomi-kun, if you want to play tricks or bully, you can do it to me.”

Harumi accurately understood the subtle emotions between Koutarou and Harumi. Koutarou would only play tricks or bully someone he liked. Kenji suffering the very worst of it was more than enough proof. That's why Harumi was envious of Clan.

“Uhm... then I'll start with this.”

Koutarou lightly flicked his finger at Harumi's forehead. Thanks to Clan's invention, he no longer needed to treat Harumi with extra care because of her handicap. That said, she was still his upperclassmen and should be treated with respect, so he started of with lighter mischief.

“Ow... ufufu.”

Harumi pressed her hands against her slightly reddened forehead and happily smiled. Her ultimate goal was to reach an intense level like Theia and Yurika, but she knew that Koutarou had been worried about her body just a while back, so right now, this was satisfactory.

"...You sure are whimsical too, Harumi."

Clan let out a sigh. Harumi responded by smiling at Clan.

"Clan-san, you just said 'too' didn't you?"

"T-That was just a mistake! There's no ulterior motive!"

"I'll just leave it at that."

In the end, Clan's face turned red and she turned away from Koutarou and Harumi.

Many among Koutarou and the others had special powers or technologies. If they used those this test of courage would be boring. So Koutarou and the others decided not to use those. This was also to protect the hunters and the employees who would be acting as ghosts, but Koutarou didn't mention that of course.

At 8PM the first team set out. The first team consisted of Sanae, Yurika and the cosclub president.

"Noooooooo! I don't want to take a test of courage with a former ghost and a fake shrine maiden!! Anything but thaaaat!!"

"My, Yurika-chan, you're in such high spirits."

“Yurika can be really useless some days, but when she has to do something, she will.”

“Today is one of those useless days!! Save me! Save meee, Satomi-saaaaan!!”

The other two team members had to drag the scared and screaming Yurika with them. A few minutes after they had set off, Yurika's screams could no longer be heard. The 13 still at the starting point didn't know if that was because of the distance or if it was because she had fainted. But nobody cared all that much.

Seeing that everything had gotten quiet, the second team set out. The second team consisted of Theia, Maki and Kenji.

“I just hope we come across ghosts that we can defeat with martial arts.”

“I've heard that when using martial arts against souls, a clear intent to attack is more important than power.”

“Hmm... I guess I'll have to try it.”

“I don't think there's a need to try. Let's finish this without a fuss.”

On this team, Theia and Maki were fighters with a lack of Japanese common sense, and Kenji was trying to follow up for them. However, Kenji was scared of ghosts and his insistence was weak. Whether he could stop these two willful girls from being reckless was questionable.

PART 11

Koutarou, Harumi and Clan were the third team to set out. Because Theia and the others weren't as noisy as the team before them, they could set out after a few minutes delay. Clan and Harumi were at the front with Koutarou behind them.

“Bertorion, if you're a knight, then be more knight-like and stand at the front.”

Clan was dissatisfied with Koutarou being behind her. As both a princess and a woman, she wanted him to be ahead of them.

“That might be proper manners, but if I'm at the front it would be boring right?”

“Why?”

“Because I can sense presences to a certain degree.”

Koutarou was behind the other two for a reason. Because of spiritual circuits that Sanae had created in him, Koutarou could sense presences of those around him. Even though he tried not to, because Sanae was too excellent, he could still tell to a certain degree. If Harumi and Clan could tell by looking at his back, things would become boring. So Koutarou decided to bring up the rear in an attempt to give them a proper surprise or two.

“I guess it can't be helped...”

Hearing Koutarou's explanation, Clan earnestly gave up. Knowing that Koutarou was doing this out of consideration, only her tone of voice had resistance left.

“Clan-san, the two of us should work together.”

“...You're right. This is a rare chance, we should enjoy ourselves.”

“Yes.”

With Harumi and Clan on the front, Koutarou and the others left the inn's backyard and began climbing up the mountain path.

Koutarou had rushed up this mountain path last year to save Sanae. However, this year was awfully carefree. His teammates, Harumi and Clan were casually chatting as they climbed. Without anyone to save or defeat, the calm and peaceful atmosphere surrounded Koutarou and the others.

“Damn, I got bitten by a mosquito.”

“That's because you didn't spray on the insect repellent.”

“Ah, I have some medicine for insect bites.”

“Thank you very much, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Since none of them were scared of ghosts, it seemed like they were simply taking a walk. A cheerful and lively walk on a summer night.

“Ah, this medicine is cool. That feels good.”

“Right? It's been my favorite for years now.”

“Bertorion, turn this way please.”

“Hm.”

Clan sprayed Koutarou.

“Now this way.”

“Hm.”

She then sprayed him again.

“...Alright.”

“Thank you, Clan.”

“Be more careful in the future please. Men are already careless enough when it comes to this kind of thing.”

“Okay.”

“Clan-san, you could just always do it for him.”

“No thank you! I am not a servant!”

Clan blushed and strongly refused before turning away. Harumi then brought her lips close to Clan's ear and quietly whispered.

“...If you're too stubborn you'll lose out.”

“...I-I'm not being... stubborn...”

“...I was always holding back and lost out. That's why I can tell.”

“...Harumi...”

After listening to Harumi, Clan thought to herself for a while before lightly coughing and turning back to Koutarou. Harumi looked at her back with a smile.

“Ahem. T-That said, since you probably won't remember, let me know if you forget right away.”

“What now, Clan. You're being awfully kind today.”

“You didn't have to add 'today'”!

“I know. It was just embarrassing to honestly praise you.”

“You two-faced sourpuss! One day I'll make you prostrate and make you say you l—”

Clan got excited and was about to say something very decisive when she got interrupted.

“Roaaaaarr!!”

“We~lco~me~!”

Two ghosts jumped out from the nearby bushes, a small plump and a tall one. The ghosts had their arms raised to make themselves look bigger and approached Koutarou and the others.

“Kyaaaaa!?”

Clan responded by letting out a loud scream. But that wasn't because they were ghosts, but because they had suddenly appeared while she was focused on Koutarou. She was simply surprised from a sudden event.

“This time was a success.”

“Alright!”

Familiar voices could be heard from underneath the ghosts' masks. Since they had met just before Koutarou realized that the voices belonged to the hunters. Noticing Koutarou's glance, the two ghosts returned to the bushes as they gave him a simple wave. They still had two more groups to go through.

“Clan-san, they're gone.”

“W-W-What was that just now!?”

“Those were the ghosts for this test of courage. And you were surprised by them.”

“I-It's not like I was scared! It was just so sudden they surprised me...”

“I know.”

“Then that's good... phew...”

Clan had been so surprised her heart was still throbbing. She took a deep breath and relaxed her body.

“By the way, Clan.”

“What?”

“Would you like to walk yourself, or would you prefer to continue on like this?”

“Eh...?”

There, Clan finally noticed what kind of position she was in. In her surprise, she had jumped onto Koutarou and was embracing him even now.

“I-I'll walk! I'll walk on my own, thank you very much!”

Clan hurriedly escaped from Koutarou's arms and began awkwardly walking. Looking at her from behind it was clear that she was quite shaken up.

“Fufufu... Oh Clan-san...”

Clan's appearance was far too amusing so Harumi let out a adorable laugh as she followed after her.

PART 12

Ever since they encountered the ghost hunters acting as ghost, new ghosts appeared every few minutes. However, they were all fakes that the People of the Earth were acting as. They did no harm. Knowing that there was no danger, the atmosphere shifted towards enjoying their sudden appearances.

“Satomi-kun, don't you think the area behind that corner is suspicious?”

“No comments.”

“Ah, I see. You can tell.”

“Tell me, Bertorion. It's so irritating being surprised time and time again.”

“Not going to happen. That is also part of this test of courage.”

“Then why don't you stay a little further back, Clan-san?”

“I don't want to do that either!”

Clan was in a bad mood, having been surprised several times. However, Koutarou and Harumi were both enjoying this test of courage. Harumi's eyes sparkled as she wondered when the next ghost would appear and Koutarou enjoyed seeing Harumi's and Clan's different reactions.

“Seriously, what do the people on Earth find so fun about this...”

Clan muttered in a bad mood. She had a hard time understanding Earth's unique culture. Seeing Clan like that, Harumi smiled.

“I think there are two reasons.”

“What are they?”

“One reason is to interact with something that doesn't happen daily. When you do the same thing day in and day out, you sometimes want to do something different.”

Going to school and studying everyday would make one want to get away from that every once in awhile. One of the means for that was this test of courage.

“I see.”

“That said, so many things had happen to us that reason isn't all that applicable.”

“Ahaha, that might be true.”

All kinds of things happened to Koutarou and the others in room 106. Enemies would come attacking one in a while, but most of it was fun. As a result there was no lack of difference in their everyday life.

“What's the second reason?”

“That's... similar to the first reason, but you get the chance to see expressions you rarely see on your friends faces, I think.”

“...The chance to see rare expressions?”

Clan had a perplexed look on her face. Having had few friends before she came to room 106, those words didn't quite make sense to her.

“Like how you're a timid person who hates being surprised, or how on the opposite side of it, Sakuraba-senpai is a bit of an oddball who likes being scared.”

“I see…”

“Satomi-kun, what is oddball supposed to mean.”

Koutarou's follow-up helped Clan understand but now Harumi puffed up her cheeks in dissatisfaction. She didn't like being called an oddball by Koutarou.

“I was only exaggerating to make it easier to understand.”

“Really?”

“Really. You're awfully persistent today, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“I felt like since we're doing a test of courage I should show you my bad side too. I want you to see 'Sakuraba Harumi' and not the normal 'Sakuraba-senpai'...”

“A bad side? ...That's an awfully cute bad side.”

“I'm a girl after all. Fufufu.”

Thanks to Clan's invention, PAF, Harumi had overcome her handicap. Moreover, since she had come all this way to play, she felt more open hearted. Like she had said, she was showing off a rare side of herself.

“In Harumi's case, even if she tries to show off her bad side, she—”

In that moment, Clan vanished from in front of Koutarou and Harumi as a rumbling sound could be heard.

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

Clan had been standing on the side of a valley, but that place had collapsed. The area that had collapsed hadn't been that wide so she wasn't hurt, but she continued sliding down the slope.

“Clan-san!!”

“Clan!? Damnit!!”

Koutarou summoned up his spiritual energy and jumped onto the slope without hesitation. He then ran down the slope, chasing after Clan. Normally this was incredibly dangerous, but with his physical abilities strengthened it was a feat just barely possible for Koutarou.

“Kyaaaaaaa!!”

“There she is!”

Relying on her voice as he looked around, Koutarou spotted Clan's aura, surrounded by spiritual energy from trees and plants. She couldn't kill her momentum and simply continued sliding down the slope. Since she had left behind her useful tools for this test of courage, there was nothing she could do.

“Not good, there's a cliff up ahead!”

If Clan continued sliding down the slope, she would fall off a cliff. If that happened she had no chance of surviving. That's why Koutarou disregarded the danger and sprinted towards her at full speed.

“Clan!!”

“Bertorion!?”

Koutarou was somehow able to grab a hold of her hand. However, this was where things got difficult. Koutarou and Clan had to stop before they fell down the cliff. However, both of them had built up quite the momentum which they had to kill or they'd end up falling.

“Uoooooo!!”

With Clan's hand in his right hand, Koutarou grabbed a hold of a tree branch with his left.

However, the branch broke as it was too thin to support their weight. Because of that, they lost their last chance to decelerate and were tossed into the air.

“Noooooooo!!”

“Not good!!”

Koutarou and Clan fell towards the bottom of the valley. Unfortunately, the bottom of the valley was rocky and it was clear what would happen if they crashed into that.

At this rate both of us will die!!

Having realized what would happen Koutarou pulled Clan closer to him and firmly embraced her. He was going use his own body to cushion Clan's fall.

“You can't! At this rate you will—”

“If I don't do anything we'll both die!!”

Koutarou and Clan had three options, they do nothing and fall, Koutarou protects Clan or Clan protects Koutarou. The one with the highest probability of survival was Koutarou protecting Clan. Not doing anything was out of the question, and Clan might be too small to protect Koutarou. So by method of elimination, the only plausible option was Koutarou protecting Clan. But even without the method of elimination, Koutarou would have chosen the same thing. He wasn't strong enough to quietly let those close to him die.

“Let me go, Bertorion, if we're going to die we should die together!”

“Who'd listen to you, idiot!”

“Bertorion!!”

Clan tried to escape from Koutarou's arms but she was no match for his physical strength. A knight couldn't leave a princess be in a situation like this. Koutarou was going to die to protect Clan.

“Satomi-kun!!”

However, Koutarou and Clan were never slammed into the rocky bottom of the valley. That is because Harumi had removed the limiter on her PAF and flew through the skies to save them.

Clan's invention, PAF, shared functions with Koutarou's armor, but was using a barrier that transformed in real-time instead. Of course it also came with the ability to fly. However, since the barrier was replacing the mechanical parts of the armor, the more power Harumi used, the more it drained the battery. Because of that, the output was normally limited and flight was impossible. Harumi had removed that limiter to save Koutarou and Clan.

“I'm glad, the battery lasted until the end.”

Harumi put down Koutarou and Clan at the bottom of the valley as she touched the small box attached to her waist. As she did, an alarm that had been ringing all this time stopped. At the same time, the barrier covering her body vanished. Having saved the two, PAF's batteries had been completely drained.

“You saved us, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“I'm glad you're okay.”

“You have my thanks, Harumi. I am in your debt now.”

“My debt... but you're the one who invented this device, Clan-san.”

“In that case, I will present you with an even more complete device one day.”

“Yes. I am looking forward to it.”

Thanks to Harumi's quick wits, Koutarou and Clan had narrowly escaped from certain death. They were deeply relieved from their close call. That's why they sighed greatly after thanking Harumi.

“Haa... still that was dangerous...”

“Ah... that's right, Clan, are you okay? You rolled down the slope for quite a while.”

“I'd like to say I'm okay, but it seems I've twisted my ankle. I also have some scrape wounds.”

“I see. We should get back and treat you right away then.”

Sadly, Koutarou and the others didn't have any tools for treatment with them. In order for them to treat Clan's leg they would need to meet up with the other girls of room 106 first.

“But Satomi-kun. What do we do now? Even if we're supposed to return, we don't know where we are...”

“That's a good point.”

When Harumi pointed that out, Koutarou finally realized that they were lost. To be more accurate, they knew what they should do to return but they couldn't actually execute it. Since there was no cellphone coverage here they would need to find another way to get back.

“For the time being, I think it would be good to head over there.”

“Over where?”

“Over there. Just past the valley is a small hut, right?”

“Ah! Good eye, Clan!”

As luck would have it, there was an old wooden hut near Koutarou and the others. They didn't know what it was for, but whether they would rest, treat Clan's leg or look for a path, heading towards that hut should be of great help.

PART 13

Approaching the hut that Clan had found they spotted a partially destroyed kiln used to create charcoal next to it. This hut had been abandoned several decades ago when charcoal was still a popular fuel.

“It looks like we can rest inside.”

Since burning charcoal took a lot of time, it was common to have a residential space next to it. Charcoal burning hut's would sometimes appear in the novels that Harumi enjoyed reading, so she was well aware of their function.

“I just hope there's a phone...”

Clan's voice sounded out from behind Koutarou's back. Because of her twisted ankle she was being piggybacked by Koutarou. It wasn't like Clan was completely unable to walk on her own, but Koutarou didn't let her walk, just in case.

“Considering it's sad state the chances for that are low.”

There was no signs of civilization on the hut. There were no electric wires nor antennas on the roof. It was a several decade old hut preserved in time.

“Let's take a look for the time being.”

“Yeah.”

With Harumi in the lead, the group approached the hut. After traveling some distance, Koutarou suddenly looked up above him. The stars were shining bright and lighting up the surroundings.

“Bertorion?”

“Take a look, Clan. What a beautiful night sky.”

“You're right...”

Koutarou temporarily stopped and looked up at the sky together with Clan. Being far from the city the stars were bright and clear. It was like jewels had been scattered across the sky above Koutarou and the others. As Koutarou looked up at the sky, he felt like something similar had happened before.

“...Where was that...”

“What is it, Satomi-kun?”

Noticing that Koutarou had stopped, Harumi stopped as well before turning around. She followed his gaze and looked up at the starry sky.

“Looking up at the stars like this, I feel like I've seen this before.”

“Ah, you're right...”

Still looking up at the stars Harumi smiled nostalgically. Harumi remembered clearly. It was the day when she had first met Koutarou.

“That is probably when you and I first met, Koutarou-sama. Back then you were also carrying Clan-sama remember? And...”

When Harumi had been cornered by a cliff, a knight in blue armor had made his dashing appearance and defeated the coup d'état army. After that, the knight carried his servant, which she later found out wasn't actually his servant, on his back and walked across a forest together with Harumi. And after reuniting with her comrades, Koutarou spoke under the starry sky.

“From an endless time and a countless distance... that was what you said as you looked up at the sky, Koutarou-sama. I am sure that is what you are thinking of.”

Those words were firmly burnt into Harumi's very being. That was just how deep of an impression they had carried. That's why she would never forget those words no matter how much time passed. And relying on the feelings in those words, she had found Koutarou.

“Harumi, you...”

Clan's eyes were wide open, and so were Koutarou's. The two of them were speechless.

“Eh?”

Harumi was puzzled by Clan's and Koutarou's reaction. However, that confusion made her question her own words.

Koutarou-sama? Looking up at the starry sky? Aren’t these princess Alaia’s memories...

Eventually Harumi realized what she had said and her face turned bright red.

“I-I'm sorry, Satomi-kun! I confused princess Alaia's memories with my own... I'm really sorry for saying something strange!”

Harumi had inherited Alaia's memories together with the ability to control Signaltin's powers, but there was a clear distinction between their memories. Since Alaia's memories were overlapping with Harumi's role as Alaia for the plays, they didn't mix with her own memories. However, when her feelings were elevated Alaia's memories and words would sometimes appear on the surface. Harumi was embarrassed as she felt like she had gotten too into her role.

This surprisingly natural match... it’s unscientific but Harumi might really be Alaia’s reincarnation...

However, to Clan who personally knew Alaia, it didn't feel like Harumi had gotten too into her role. In Fact, it was like Alaia herself was standing there which was more surprising and interesting to her. It was to the point where Clan, who had absolute trust in science, began wondering if she was the reincarnation of Alaia.

“It's fine. I was surprised, but it was like I was able to meet Her Majesty again, so I was kind of glad.”

Like Clan, Koutarou too was surprised by Harumi's speech and behavior that was practically identical to that of Alaia's. While Koutarou clearly separated Harumi and Alaia from one another, he didn't hate feeling the presence of Alaia from within Harumi. Since it was someone he still wished to see from time to time, he was happy that he could feel her presence from Harumi.

“I'm glad you said that.”

Harumi thought that Koutarou and Clan would laugh at her, and she felt relief when that didn't happen. By now she had completely returned to being Harumi.

“But that's right, you know us when we were in Forthorthe, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Yes. I have memories from princess Alaia's point of view, however there are things I don't know and things that vague too.”

While Harumi had inherited Alaia's memories, it wasn't perfect. There were memories that were missing. The vast distance that is 2,000 years and 10 million light years must have weakened the memories that lacked deep impression. At the same time, there were many memories that were suspected that Alaia intentionally chose not to pass down. There were no memories of people dying for example. Clan's conjecture was that this was a method to keep Harumi's personality from being affected.

“That's why I know that Satomi-kun and Clan-san lived in the same room.”

“Please forget about that, Harumi!”

“Fufufu... also that Satomi-kun washed Clan-san's underwear.”

“Kya kya kya!! When did you see that!?”

“That's right. Clan went on about how a princess doesn't do her own laundry. At the same time she didn't want to ask Mary either, what a selfish princess.”

“In the end, Koutarou-sama... I mean Satomi-kun had to wash them by hand.”

“I spent everyday wondering if it was okay for me to get used to looking at those.”

“Geez, the two of you are being really mean!!”

Clan felt like running away from this situation, but being on Koutarou's back, she was unable to do so. With nothing else she could do, she pushed her face against his back to escape from their gazes while pouring more strength into the arms wrapped around Koutarou.

“But...”

Seeing that Clan was looking away, Harumi's smile changed a little.

“In the end, this is princess Alaia's memories. I wasn't the person there, it was princess Alaia. That's a bit sad.”

Harumi looked sad just as she said. Memories were memories, they were different from the actual experience. It was similar to watching a recording, it wasn't an experience she had shared with others. That saddened Harumi. While it might be a common subject between them, Harumi hadn't been part of it.

“That might be true.”

“...”

Koutarou agreed, causing Harumi to drop her shoulders. Having Koutarou feel that way was yet another reason to be sad. Even though it was the truth, she didn't like hearing Koutarou say that

Harumi was irrelevant. However, that was only half-right. Koutarou wasn't finished speaking.

“But, if something similar were to happen in the future, I'm sure you'd remember today. You would remember, me, you and Clan being lost in the woods.”

“Satomi-kun...!”

Harumi raised her face and eyes. Upon seeing Koutarou's smile her disappointment vanished in an instant. An expectation of sorts resided in those eyes.

“We can just create our experiences from now on. We have more than enough time.”

“Ah...”

A small breath of air escaped her lips before the lips rose to form a smile. Her eyes were filled with joy, and that overflowing joy turned into tears and streamed down her cheeks. Harumi's heart throbbed and she felt like crying out loudly.

“...Sa... Satomi-kun, Clan-san... would you help me creating experiences from now on...?”

That was Harumi pushing herself to her limit. Considering her past weak constitution, Harumi had given up on a lot of things in life. However, there was no longer any need to give up, and there were people that wished for her not to give up as well. That's why Harumi mustered her courage to take a step forward. She was sure it would be of help for Koutarou as well.

“Yes, of course, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“You don't have to be so reserved, Harumi. You are one of my few friends.”

“...Thank you very much, Satomi-kun, Clan-san. I am really I came to beach with all of you.”

To other people it might be an ordinary step forward.

However, to Harumi it was a large step in the direction of the future.

PART 14

A first aid kit had been left behind in the hut. That said, having been left behind for decades, the only usable items were bandage, gauze and some simple medicine. Even then it was far better than nothing, and they would be very helpful to treat Clan's injuries.

“That should do it.”

“Satomi-kun, you're pretty good at first aid treatment.”

“I learned back in Forthorthe. It was necessary after all.”

“He was terrible at remembering though.”

“Ahaha, so you were the one that taught him, Clan-san.”

“Sakuraba-senpai, can I leave this to you for a moment?”

“Satomi-kun?”

“I was thinking of taking a look outside.”

As Koutarou said that he showed a map to Harumi and Clan. When he had been searching the hut for something useful he found this map next to the first aid kit. The map seemed to be for the area around them and if they used it well they should be able to return home without getting lost. So Koutarou decided to go take a first look at their surroundings.

“I understand. Please be careful.”

“I will.”

“Just don't carelessly go too far away.”

“I know. Alright then, I'm off.”

Koutarou grabbed the map and a flashlight and left the hut. After that the light could be seen from outside the window a few times but eventually even that couldn't be seen. Koutarou left the hut, leaving Harumi and Clan on their own.

“Since the treatment is over, I'll dim the lights a little bit.”

“Yes, please do.”

Harumi stood up. A flashlight had been hung down the ceiling to light up the hut and Harumi reduced the brightness of it. Since they didn't know how long the flashlight would last it would be better if they conserved the battery.

“Okay.”

Done with her task, Harumi returned to Clan and sat down, facing her.

“Thank you, Harumi.”

“No, it's nothing.”

Silence fell between Harumi and Clan. Neither of them were used to actively talking to others and when the two were left on their own, they rarely talked. However, it wasn't like that was painful. Thanks to them often moving together because of PAF they learned that they had a lot in common and developed a mutual understanding.

“Hey, Harumi.”

However, Clan broke that silence. There was something she wanted to ask Harumi. With Koutarou gone now was her chance.

“May I ask you something?”

“Sure. Go ahead.”

Harumi nodded. Since Clan have always helped her out she had no reason to refuse.

“This is hard to ask, but... I will ask anyways.”

Clan began speaking and adjusted her glasses.

“Harumi, do you love Koutarou?”

“...!?”

Clan's question caused Harumi's expression to freeze. However, since it was too straight of a question, Harumi found herself unable to answer as she instinctively held her breath.

“If you don't want to, you don't have to answer.”

“It's not like I don't want too. I was just surprised...”

Harumi shook her head. Her long hair fluttered in the air. Looking at her silhouette in the darkened room, it was like Clan really was facing Alaia.

Harumi put her hand on her chest, took a deep breath and answered Clan's question.

“I... love Satomi-kun. Satomi-kun is strong and kind, but he also has a weak and lonely side of him... I want to warm up that part of him... that's why I...”

Harumi held back her desire to run away and asserted her feelings. She knew this was something she couldn't run away from or hold back on. Clan smiled wryly.

“Knowing that much, neither of us can back down now, Harumi.”

“Could it be, you too, Clan-san?”

“Yes. While I was looking at that stupid knight who could only live an awkward life I grew attached to him. Besides, he's also one of the very few who truly understands me.”

“I see...”

Learning that Clan felt the same way she did, Harumi felt relieved. While they should be rivals as women, she felt neither hostility nor a sense of danger. If anything, she felt reassured knowing she had more companions apart from Yurika.

“You seem confident, Harumi.”

Clan felt like Harumi's lack of a sense of danger was a sign of confidence. However, Harumi shook her head.

“It's not confidence, if anything, I'm lacking in that.”

“You mean you're not confident?”

“Yes. Satomi-kun has a very large hole in his heart. And I feel like I won't be able to fill it all up as I am still a child. That's why there needs to be more people that can pour warmth into his heart.”

That was something she had talked to with Yurika in the past. The hole in Koutarou's heart ran deep and large. It wasn't something an immature woman could fill on her own. But Harumi wanted to save Koutarou right away. She wanted to fill that hole. For that sake she needed others who shared her desire.

“Harumi, you might understand Bertorion better than anyone else.”

“I understood there were some special circumstances in the background from the moment a boy asked to learn how to knit. All I did after that was watch.”

Harumi had learned of the hole in Koutarou's heart through the knitting society. It was hard to believe that a normal high school boy would want to knit. Especially for an athletic youth like Koutarou. Yet in reality, Koutarou was earnestly toiling away in their club activities. Harumi had always wondered why. From there, Harumi had spent a long period of time puzzling together what Koutarou had mentioned to reach a certain conclusion. Koutarou wanted to finish knitting the sweater that someone who passed away had left behind. After realizing that, Harumi had always been on Koutarou's side. Eventually she grew attracted to his earnest appearance.

“But you know this too, right Clan-san?”

Harumi's intuition told her that Clan had realized the same thing.

“Yes. I happened to be there when it happened. It's not like I figured it out on my own like you.”

Clan was aware of Koutarou's circumstances because she had been with him in the world of ten years ago. There, she had touched upon Koutarou's suffering and understood his solitude.

“I believe most have reached the same conclusion or are on the verge of it.”

“I'm sure they are...”

As far as Clan knew, Kiriha had without a doubt reached that conclusion. It was also very likely that Clan's rivals Theia and Ruth had as well. Harumi had also consulted Yurika about this. The remaining ones were Maki, Sanae and Shizuka, but considering their behavior up until now, it was likely they still had reached the same conclusion. That's why Clan and Harumi both assumed that all the girls of room 106 were aware of Koutarou's circumstances.

“A lot of warmth will be needed to heal Satomi-kun. We need to teach him that he can rely on the warmth of others.”

“Until that's over, Bertorion won't choose anyone anyways.”

“Yes.”

“Haah... he really is a troublesome man.”

Clan let out a sigh and dropped her shoulders. Clan was amazed at herself for falling for someone so difficult. Harumi on the other hand was smiling.

“However, on the other hand, I think it is wonderful. We can be of help to the man we love after all.”

Koutarou wasn't some invincible hero. That's why Harumi and the others could stand next to him. There were things they could do for Koutarou. It wasn't a one-sided relationship where they were only being protected. They could be equals. Harumi was very happy about that.

“I'm envious that you can actually say that out loud.”

“It took over a year for me to be able to though.”

“I wonder if I will be able to do the same some day...”

“You will. You're a girl after all.”

“You're the only who'd say that, Harumi.”

“Satomi-kun says it a lot as well, doesn't he?”

“He is just playing around with me!”

“Fufufu...”

Harumi and Clan continued chatting away. The topic gradually shifted away from Koutarou and onto other things. However the contents were much deeper than before. Through their chat just now, the two were now getting along a lot more.

PART 15

When Koutarou returned to the hut, Sanae-chan was on his back. She had worried for Koutarou who wasn't coming no matter how long she waited and left her body to go look.

“Here it is... I'm back, Clan, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Ah, there you are, Harumi! Glasses! Are you okay!?”

When Koutarou entered the hut, the two stopped chatting and turned towards Koutarou and Sanae-chan.

“Welcome back, Satomi-kun, Higashihongan-san.”

“I'm fine. I just twisted my ankle a little.”

“I see, that's good...”

Sanae-chan had worried upon hearing from Koutarou that Clan had been hurt, but seeing Clan's safe and sound she let out a sigh of relief.

“I'm sorry for making you worry.”

“It's okay, you're okay after all. But let's wait a moment before we go back. Everyone is on their way here.”

Since the team following Koutarou and the others entered the goal before they did, Sanae-chan left to search for Koutarou. If Sanae-chan got serious it was an easy task to chase after Koutarou and before long she was able to find him. Using their mental link, Sanae-san let Theia and the others know that Koutarou had been found. And by now they should all be on their way to this hut.

“Clan-san, it looks like this will be resolved easier than we thought.”

“This is a little different from the past Forthorthe after all.”

“Fufufu.”

While they might have various powers, Harumi and Clan were normal girls. They had gotten anxious from being lost in the woods. However, it was alright now and the two smiled with relief.

“By the way, Koutarou, why did this happen?”

“Well, Clan was being slow and—”

“Anyone would fall if their footing collapses!!”

“There you have it.”

“Hmm.”

Since Clan had said everything he wanted to, Koutarou omitted his explanation. Sanae-chan nodded satisfied, but Clan was far from satisfied.

“...I-I'll kill you... I really will kill you one day...”

“Now, now, calm down. It's true that you're slow.”

“Harumi!?”

“Fufufu, I was joking.”

“Gee~z, you don't have to be a bully too.”

“I'm sorry, Clan-san.”

With four of them gathered and the solution to their problem in sight, the atmosphere in the hut grew bright, to the point that nobody minded the dim hut. It would surely grow even brighter when the others arrived. That was the relationship Koutarou and the others had, and the way of life they had all chosen.

Mother's and Daughter's Wish

PART 1

Saturday, August 14

Koutarou was kind to anyone, but he kept others at a distance. And the reason for that stemmed from a loss in his family. While he hadn't said so directly, Theia had noticed that problem with Koutarou's heart.

"...and that's why Ruth and I want to do something about Koutarou, but we can't find a way to resolve this right away. We're taking it one step at a time."

Having realized that, Theia couldn't leave it be. However, she couldn't find a fundamental solution to the problem. In the past Koutarou had promised to make sure that the girls lived a happy life, but that was it.

"...I see... the reason for Reios-sama's heart was formed by his mother's death..."

Having heard what Theia said, Elfaria looked down.

Having witnessed the death of his mother, Koutarou couldn't overlook any misfortune infront of him. However, having suddenly lost someone important to him, Koutarou simply gave up, realizing that no relationship lasted forever. As a result, while he might protect his promises and other people, he didn't expect the same from others.

"Mother, how can Ruth and I save Koutarou?"

Wanting to an answer to this question, Theia asked Elfaria on board the Blue Knight. Theia and Ruth were still teenage girls so they were still inexperienced. Theia was hoping that Elfaria would be able to make up for their lack of experience.

“Well...”

Elfaria stopped to think. She was still past 30 years old, but she had a very youthful appearance. That youthful impression was reinforced as she tilted her head while she was thinking.

“...”

“...”

Theia held her breath as she waited for Elfaria's answer. Ruth who was preparing some Rubustori tea was also pointing her ear in Elfaria's direction.

“First of all... I think rushing things is a bad idea. Reios-sama is essentially afraid of creating bonds with others. Theia, you need to be extra careful since you're so hasty.”

“I know! That's why I came to ask mother before I do something reckless!”

“Your majesty, what should we do?”

“Fufufu...”

Seeing Theia and Ruth instinctively lean forward to hear her words, Elfaria smiled. Puzzled by her reaction, the two looked at each other in confusion.

“It pays to go on a journey. You, who had only been creating more enemies, are now frantic to save others. And the very serious Ruth is so passionately desiring an answer. This is something I couldn't imagine from the two of you a year ago. You have truly grown up well.”

Having been separate from the two for a long period of time, their change was very obvious to Elfaria.

Theia had never had a father and her mother was often absent due to her work as the empress. That's why she was desperately trying to be of help to her mother. Her only ally was her childhood friend Ruth. Ruth was the only that would pour love into Theia and never betray her. Because Theia was like that, she rarely trusted others and ended up making more and more enemies. She didn't have the generosity to accept others. Yet now that Theia was surrounded by many friends. Trying to save one of them, Theia was breaking down her former self.

Ruth was very similar. She had a very serious personality, and combined with her title as Guardian Knight she often killed her own feelings. She never said anything selfish and always worked for Theia's sake. While there were times when Ruth would give her opinion to Theia, that was always for Theia's sake, and not because of any desire of her own. That's why, when Elfaria heard about the beetle incident, and Ruth annulling her arranged marriage, she realized that it wasn't just Theia that had changed, but Ruth as well. Before she knew it, Ruth had evolved from being something similar to a mere tool, to someone who could balance their official position and feelings. At the same time, she tried to walk alongside Theia. She had become the ideal childhood friend.

Elfaria found both of their changes desirable. The current Theia could confidently be called a successor to the throne. Also, the current Ruth who was supporting Theia could be called her chief vassal. Since these results were far more than what Elfaria had expected, she was truly glad the two traveled the universe for the trial.

“Ruth and I may have grown up, but that won't save our knight. Just what should we do?”

“Please tell us your majesty. Please guide us immature down the right path.”

The two were desperate. This was a problem as important to them as being chased out of their own country. Looking at the two acting like that, Elfaria laughed.

“You two being the way you are right now is the answer. Ah, how funny. Fufufufu.”

“The way we are...”

“...Right now?”

Theia and Ruth looked at each other once more upon hearing that. Then, after Elfaria had finished laughing she explained what she meant.

“Just make Reios-sama grow up the same way you two did. He has changed on the inside as well, hasn't he?”

“Yes. Though only a little...”

“I believe so too.”

The two nodded at the same time. They had both experienced that.

“Then Reios-sama should be able to accept you closer to his heart. Just being the way you are right now, as long as you stay by Reios-sama's side, you will be able to mend his heart. Of course it will take time, so I believe it might be difficult for my hasty Theia...”

Elfaria smiled as she spoke and took a sip of the tea that Ruth had poured up for her. Ruth was very capable and the exact flavor she had expected spread throughout her mouth.

“So we haven't been useless to him...”

“I feel a little relieved.”

“What you need to do right now is to be Reios-sama's family. I believe that is the most important thing.”

“Then we should be fine mother. I have confidence in that.”

Theia put her hand on her chest and gave Elfaria a large nod.

During the battle a while back, the Sun Rangers had asked what kind of relationship they had with Koutarou, and Theia had boldly answered that they were family. Theia had absolute confidence that the residents of room 106 needed each other to the point that they could be called family.

“And at the very end, I am sure that Reios-sama will have to come face to face with the hole in his heart. When that time comes, help him.”

In Elfaria's mind, what someone needed to fully recover was time and healing. By having Theia and the others staying with Koutarou,

that shouldn't be a problem, and once the hole in Koutarou's heart shrank to a certain size he would have to face that for the final showdown. However, facing that your own mother died a tragic death in your place wasn't something so easy to do. When that time came, Koutarou would surely need help.

“Listen up, Theia, Ruth. Brace yourself to spend as much time with Reios-sama as you did to form your current relationship, and then, at the very end, lend Reios-sama your strength. That is almost certainly the only way for you two to save him.”

“I understand, mother! I will do just that!”

“Thank you very much, your majesty. I will carve your words into my heart.”

Theia and Ruth held hands and nodded. They were prepared to walk down the path that Elfaria had shown them together.

PART 2

Having finished talking with Elfaria, the two headed back towards room 106. That was normally not their home, but what they had said, and what they had gotten back as an answer caused them to admit that they were residents of that room.

“I'm back.”

“We are back.”

“Welcome back, Theia, Ruth-san.”

Koutarou welcomed the two back. Since the two of them had invaded Koutarou's room, he had no reason to welcome them, but

his voice was bright and he was without a doubt truly welcoming them.

This is probably what it means to be a family...

Theia thought back to Elfaria's words. These normal interactions between them and Koutarou would eventually save him. As she thought like that, she was overcome by a refreshing feeling.

“Master, what are you doing?”

“I'm doing the summer vacation homework. I've been leaving it be for a while now, so I figured I should get to it while I can.”

“I see. By the way, Master, how about some barley tea?”

“I'll gladly have some.”

“Then I'll prepare it right away.”

Leaving behind a small smile, Ruth vanishes into the kitchen, leaving behind only Koutarou and Theia in the inner room. Being left alone, Theia noticed something and tilted her head in confusion.

“By the way, Koutarou, I don't see anyone else.”

There was normally a lot more people in the room. Recently it was normal for there to be ten of them. Yet, now there was just Koutarou, Theia and Ruth. Theia was curious about the remaining seven.

“They all left to go shopping. I was the only one with homework left so I stayed behind.”

With his part-time job and hanging out with classmates, Koutarou was often out of his room. As a result, he had fallen behind the other residents of room 106 on homework. And so Koutarou stayed behind to do his homework while the others went out shopping.

“You could just have someone show you their homework.”

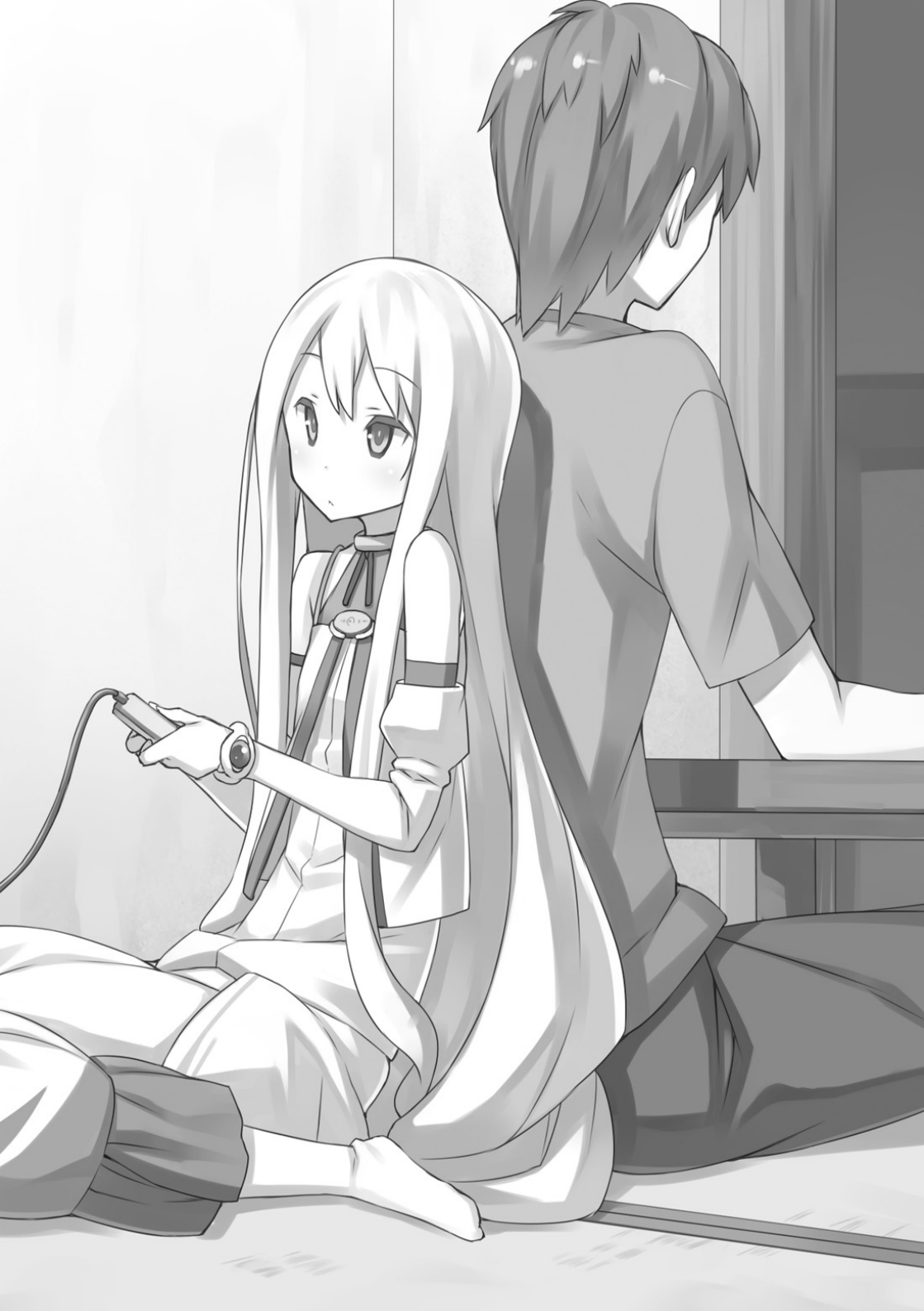
“That would be bad for Sanae's and Yurika's education, so I can't.”

“You could just have them show you in secret.”

“You can't do what you can't do, that's final.”

“You're stubborn as always. Fufu.”

Theia looked dumbfounded by Koutarou's words but her expression was bright. His words right now were fit for a knight of justice.



“I'll borrow your back for a moment.”

“Ok.”

Theia sat down back to back with Koutarou. It was convenient as their backs served as substitutes for backrests. While in that position, Theia started playing a game while Koutarou continued on his homework. Something like this wasn't enough to disrupt his concentration. It had been over a year since Theia and the others came to this room. He was used to a noisy environment.

“Hey, Koutarou.”

“Hm?”

“Once you're taking a break from homework, play with me.”

“Once I take a break.”

“Yeah.”

Koutarou and Theia carried on like that for a while. They were each doing different things, but for some reason it didn't feel like it.

Koutarou had planned to do ten pages of homework. By the time Theia and Ruth returned he was on his ninth page and within an hour he had solved all problems. And now, as promised he was playing games with Theia and Ruth.

“Theia, shouldn't we go back for a moment?”

“We'll be fine a while longer. We'll overcome it with technique.”

Koutarou and Theia was playing a two-player action RPG. The two were deep inside of a jungle and about to run out of healing items. Without any means to recover their health a single miss would lead to death.

“If we over do it we'll have to do it all over again.”

“The dignity of the Mastir family will be hurt if I back down from something of this level.”

“What dignity is there when dealing with an old program.”

“But...”

“You should prioritize Theia-chan's convenience over princess Theiamillis' convenience here.”

“...Are those Koutarou-chan's words?”

“Yeah.”

“Then it can't be helped. Let's go back.”

“That's more like it. You should obediently listen to people's warnings.”

Theia wanted to continue exploring, but after Koutarou's persuasion she decided to return to the town for a moment. After reaching town and making preparations for the next adventure, Koutarou and Theia paused the game and took a short break.

“Good work Your Highness, Master.”

Ruth put down glasses in front of the two. In the glasses were barley tea with ice floating at the top.

“Thank you, Ruth.”

“You're a lifesaver.”

Thirsty after concentrating on the game, the two gladly picked up the glasses. The cool barley tea felt great as it passed through their dry throats. Having rested up and drunk some barley tea, Theia looked up at Koutarou still holding her glass.

“Hey, Koutarou-chan.”

“Hm?”

Koutarou stopped drinking his barley tea and looked down at Theia. The two of them were now facing each other and Ruth watched over them from the side.

“There's something I want to ask.”

“I don't mind... but stop it with the Koutarou-chan.”

Theia had used the chan suffix to separate between public and private matters, but it was an embarrassing name to be called.

“Does it embarrass you?”

Theia asked after blinking twice.

“Yeah.”

Koutarou didn't avert his eyes but he was embarrassed and his voice was somewhat blunt. A smile appeared on Theia's lips as she happily continued.

“Fufu, then I'll continue with Koutarou-chan for a while.”

“Hey.”

“In return, I allow you to call me Theia-chan.”

“In that case, please call me Ruth-chan as well.”

“Hey now, you two...”

The two girls that teamed up to make fun of Koutarou made him drop his shoulders.

“More importantly, back to what I wanted to ask.”

“What do you mean more importantly.”

“Shush, Koutarou-chan.”

Theia continued with her topic, sealing off Koutarou's ability for rebuttal. Theia smiled because it was fun to trouble Koutarou and because her topic was a bright one.

“Actually, I want to let mother and the citizens to breathe the air of the surface.”

Onboard the spaceship, the Blue Knight, were Elfaria and citizens of Forthorthe who supported her. They had been on that spaceship all this time, and while there were no physical problems, mentally, they should be feeling cooped-up. So Theia wanted to take Elfaria

and the citizens down to the surface, let them breathe some fresh air and enjoy the greenery.

“That's a good idea.”

Koutarou nodded in agreement, but Ruth followed up on the topic.

“However, there are many citizens and they have almost no knowledge of Earth. Her Highness and I aren't enough. So we hoped that you could help, Mashter.”

“...It's a heartwarming story and I'd love to help, but there's one big problem.”

“What?”

“Seriously, stop it with the chan. Especially you Ruth-san.”

Koutarou held his head in pain.

“It seems like he likes it.”

“It was worth the effort to say it then.”

However, the two seemed unconcerned. They had no intentions of changing how they called him for a while.

“You guys...”

“Give it up. Ruth and I love you, Koutarou-chan.”

“But if you say that you hate us, we will stop right away, Mashter.”

“...Seriously... you two have been playing dirty lately...”

When they first met, they had clashed a lot. However, now that they got along, their methods were more fit for invaders. That said, because they were too straight with their feelings, all Koutarou could do was to silently bear it.

PART 3

After consulting the other girls of room 106 regarding letting the Forthorthe citizens descend down to Earth, they all agreed to help. Theia and Kiriha would be in charge. Theia being a leader aside, Kiriha was serving as a leader because her cooperation was needed.

One of the underground people's base would temporarily be needed to receive all of the people on the Blue Knight. It was next to impossible to receive the citizens that numbered in the hundreds in room 106. After some deliberation they decided that they could just use the radical faction's military base. Because of that, Kiriha ended up serving as one of the leaders.

The incident with the radical faction had just ended and the radical faction's military had been disbanded, leaving the bases empty. That said, since they had been used until just the other day, all of the equipment was still in order. Since there was no other use for them, they would be used to receive the Forthorthe citizens.

The radical faction had plenty of bases on the surface, but the one Theia and the others decided to use was a base on the outskirts of Kitsushouharukaze city. The base had a vast site located in the mountains away from people's eyes. It was convenient to use for the Forthorthe citizens to use.

Several large sightseeing buses were departing. The buses were full of the citizens of Forthorthe that had arrived on Earth yesterday. They had moved down to Earth yesterday morning and received a

lecture on things to keep an eye out while here. On the afternoon they got a taste of the surrounding hills and fields. Since the Forthorthe citizens looked like foreigners they looked suspicious when gathered in one place. Thus they were divided into multiple teams and scattered on several buses. The People of the Earth who had lived on the surface for longer would serve as the guides. These were Kiriha's subordinates.

“Ruth which one was that?”

“The 17th, Your Highness.”

“So the next bus is the last.”

In total there were 18 sightseeing buses prepared. There were around 40 on each bus and roughly 700 had left to go sightseeing. There were actual a couple of dozen more citizens apart from those that left on the buses but they would be staying behind at the base. They were people who preferred this place, surrounded by nature over sightseeing, those with health concerns and backup in case of an unexpected development.

“Still, Kiriha, I am impressed you managed to gather so many buses in a short amount of time. You have my thanks.”

“We People of the Earth have already spread out over a wide area. It's not that hard to gather a few buses from each area. Besides, I am in your debt after your help during that incident. I should be the one thanking you, so don't worry about it.”

Theia and Kiriha saw the 17th bus off, standing shoulder to shoulder. The children on the bus peered outside of the bus, smiling and waving at Theia. Theia waved back and smiled at them.

“Then I should be grateful for my friendship with you.”

“That's a good idea. I'll do the same.”

Theia and Kiriha smiled at each other. Their bond had deepened after the incident with the radical faction. And that wasn't just limited to them, but to all of the girls of room 106.

“Your Highness, Kiriha-sama. Master has returned.”

“I'm back everyone.”

“Good work out there.”

“Welcome back, Koutarou.”

“The 17th bus has left too.”

Koutarou's job was to guide the Forthorthe citizens from here to the bus. Once every bus departed, he returned here to report on the results.

“Kiriha-san, it's only one more, right?”

“That's right, the next bus is the last.”

“Alright.”

Koutarou nodded and looked at the building at the base. As he did, Forthorthe citizens existed the building. They were the last people to depart and were being guided by Sanae and Shizuka. By the way, Sanae's and Shizuka's job was to lead the people from the building to this place.

“Huh? It seems like Her Majesty Elfaria is coming too.”

That was when Ruth spotted Elfaria at the end of the line. She was coming here along with the other Forthorthe citizens. Besides here were Harumi and Clan as well. Harumi and Clan were serving as Elfaria's guards.

“Theia, is El...faria getting on the last bus too?”

“No, that's not on the schedule...”

If Elfaria was going to get on the bus, there would need to be extra guards on the bus, so Theia should have heard about it. Yet she hadn't. Theia shook her head at Koutarou's question.

“I suppose she's just going to see them off.”

“Then she would have done so at the start to be equal.”

“I'm sure she has some other reason. Once the last bus leaves, we'll be free too.”

Koutarou and the others had their jobs as explained, but Yurika and Maki who weren't here had their own jobs as well. They were working as traffic control and should currently be guiding the last bus inside the base from the gate.

Including Yurika and Maki, Koutarou and the others would be free once the last bus left. So it was likely that Elfaria had appeared in relation to that.

“Consider it's Her Majesty, she might want to do something on Earth.”

Everyone that had gathered nodded at Ruth's words. Koutarou especially so, as he knew how Elfaria behaved, he couldn't imagine she had come here without reason.

PART 4

What came as a surprise to the citizens of Forthorthe was the relationship between empress Elfaria, princess Theiamillis, princess Clariossa and the boy that was regarded as the legendary hero, the Blue Knight.

“He hit her! That Sir Knight hit Her Majesty!”

“What's more is that neither Her Majesty nor the two princesses are criticizing him!”

“As expected of the Blue Knight!”

“So he really is the real one!”

The relationship between the Blue Knight and the three royalties was very close. It was like they were siblings or relatives, they were in a relationship where more violent expressions of love was allowed.

“Her Majesty leaned her head forward herself.”

“She probably said something to make Blue Knight get angry on purpose.”

“Her Majesty has a childish side after all.”

“Amazing... despite disrespecting three royalties, his actions are not brought into question at all... is that Sir Knight really the Blue Knight...?”

“That's why I said it really is Blue Knight! Adults are so suspicious. It's not my fault if Blue Knight gets angry.”

Of course, violence against royalty was a major sin, regardless of reason. However, none of the three showed any signs of pointing that out. If anything, it looked like they actively sought out that kind of relationship as the girls' smiles and laughter continued.

“Regardless of if that Sir Knight is the legendary Blue Knight or not, it is clear that he's not normal.”

“Since he's an alien, they can't be related after all.”

“Either way, he is special to them, huh...”

The surprise and specialness of the young Blue Knight spread and ripple through the hearts of four Forthorthe citizens.

The citizens didn't know the reason as to why the knight's violence was being forgiven. If he was indeed the Blue Knight like they assumed, it would be a massive problem. And if he wasn't, that would be a massive problem as well.

“That Sir Knight destroyed DKI's latest weapons, and use a single ship to repel the enemy fleet.”

“Then there's the red dragon and silver haired girl with him.”

“It might not even be worth questioning whether he's the real Blue Knight or not...”

PART 5

Elfaria had gotten Koutarou angry by asking if she could go sightseeing.

A loud thud rang out.

“Ow!?”

“Of course you can't! Elle, have you forgotten who you are!?”

“After being chased out of my country by a coup d'état I'm now an unemployed hikikomori, Reios-sama.”

“You bastard, have you forgotten about your own mission!?”

“I haven't forgotten. I am continuing my information gathering to be able to retake my country. However, it is without a doubt the truth that I am unemployed.”

“Those hundreds of people would be completely lost if anything were to happen to you.”

Koutarou vehemently objected to Elfaria's sightseeing. The threat of Elexis still hadn't passed, so it was possible that she might get attacked if she walked around the city. Theia was a princess so the risk for her was lost, but Koutarou didn't have the courage to let the empress, who held the most authority, out into the city.

“That's why I'm asking you to be my guard, Reios-sama.”

“Koutarou, I'm asking you too. Mother is tired after living in space for so long. Even if the enemy doesn't attack her, it would be the same if she gave up mentally, right?”

“Ugh...”

However, upon hearing Theia's intercession, Koutarou began thinking that might be for the better. Like she said, it was necessary to lessen the strain on Elfaria's mind.

“That's right Reios-sama, if I collapse everything will be for nothing!”

However, seeing Elfaria's eyes sparkling he began having second thoughts. The danger in those hadn't changed after 20 years.

“Let's go sightseeing on Earth so I don't collapse!”

“Hey Elle, stop using yourself as a hostage to threaten me.”

“I would never threaten you. Mental health is an important problem.”

“...You're still the same way you were back then.”

“I'm still a teenager in mind and body.”

“Geez...”

Koutarou held his head. Having latched onto Theia's words, Elfaria's claims were correct. However it was still dangerous. Koutarou was reluctant to let her walk around crowded areas. After thinking for a moment, Clan gave Koutarou a helping hand.

“Phew... Bertorion, why don't you change your way of thinking for a moment?”

“What do you mean?”

“Rather than you alone, all ten of us will protect Elfaria-san. If we do that, then the chances of Elfaria-san being attacked will lower.”

Sanae's spiritual powers, Yurika's and Maki's magic, Kiriha's spiritual energy technology and brain, Theia's, Ruth's and Clan's advanced technology, Shizuka's dragon powers and Harumi's Signaltin. If all of these powers gathered to protect Elfaria the chances were that they would be able to allow Elfaria escape before they get attacked. It was also hard to imagine Elexis and Maya to attack someone so heavily defended. Just focusing this defense would let them protect Elfaria.

“...I guess that's the only way...”

After thinking over it carefully, Koutarou reluctantly agreed to Elfaria stepping out.

Sanae, Clan and Ruth could detect any approaching enemies, Yurika could then bring Elfaria to a safe place using magic prepared beforehand while the rest of the members dealt with the attackers. If they left the command to Kiriha they would be able to guard Elfaria with even more certainty. That kind of plan appeared in Koutarou's mind.

“Then let's go, Reios-sama! To explore an unknown planet!”

“...Elle, you won't die in a pretty way.”

“You'll kill me yourself, Reios-sama!?”

Elfaria's smile was so very bright.

“...You bastard... you're saying that knowing I can't, aren't you...”

As Koutarou held his head in pain, Clan began laughing for some reason.

“Ohohohohoho!”

“W-What now, all of a sudden?”

“Serves you right! That's how you always make me feel. Ohohohoho!”

Elfaria was now making Koutarou feel the same thing he made Clan feel and Clan couldn't stop herself from laughing.

PART 6

Koutarou and the others were all together to guard Elfaria, but they looked less like guards and more like a group going out to play together. Elfaria was no longer wearing her empress clothing, but had changed into Earth-style clothes. So at a first glance, it looked like some foreign tourists being guided around by a group of Japanese.

“Mother, this is called takoyaki.”

“Takoyaki? How round and peculiar. If I were to guess it looks like a food.”

“Ruth, I'll leave the detailed explanation to you.”

“Yes, Your Highness. Your Majesty, takoyaki is one of the snacks that civilians on Earth like to eat, it is very popular.”

“So it's similar to our country's Lakron?”

“Image wise it's close, but it's more normal.”

“Why not have her try some before you explain. That way is more fun too.”

“Shizuka is right. Mother, have some.”

“Fufufu, okay... hot hot.”

Elfaria timidly put the takoyaki in her mouth. And she rolled her eyes in bewilderment from the taste being different from what she had thought and the contents being hotter than expected. Seeing Elfaria react like they had hoped, the girls around her smiled.

“Takoyaki, huh...”

“Maki-chan, do you like takoyaki?”

“I haven't tried it that much, so I don't know.”

“Then give it a taste. Satomi-san!”

Yurika escaped from the circle of girls and ran up to Koutarou who was looking at the surroundings from a short distance away. She then presented both of her hands with a wide grin on her face.

“I want to treat Maki-chan to some takoyaki, so please give me money!”

Yurika was poor but haphazard, so she had no spare money. So she decided to request Koutarou's support. She believed that he would do something.

“You've finally started to straight up ask for money, huh?”

“Is that a no?”

Yurika tilted her head with a sad expression.

“...Just wait a minute.”

Koutarou reluctantly opened his wallet and pulled out a 1000 yen note. He would have rejected her request if it was just for herself, but if it was for Maki, who rarely asked for anything for herself, he couldn't refuse. While she was haphazard, Yurika was still acting for Maki's sake.

“Here.”

“Thank you very much! Maki-chan, let's go buy takoyaki!”

“Y-Yes... thank you, Satomi-kun!”

Maki thanked Koutarou as she was being pulled away by Yurika. Seeing that, Koutarou felt like his decision had been correct.

“Koutarou, haven't you been spoiling Yurika too much lately?”

That was when Sanae appeared and gave Koutarou a light tackle. Her cheeks were puffed up and she seemed to be sulking.

“What could I do. She said it was for Maki.”

“That's not what I'm talking about.”

“Then what are you talking about?”

“Here, pat it with all of your love and spoil me too.”

Sanae thrust her head towards Koutarou. She was actually sulking because she wanted to be spoiled too.

“Okay, okay.”

“When you pat me you should describe your love with words too.”

“Thank you for everything you do, lady Sanae.”

“Very good!”

Satisfied by Koutarou's head patting, Sanae returned to the group of girls. There, she received some takoyaki from Maki. Sanae didn't really feel any ill will towards Yurika or Maki, she simply wanted Koutarou to spoil her as well.

“I think this kind of accessory would look great on you Clan-san.”

“If I wear something like that, Bertorion would laugh at me!”

“Really? While he might say all kinds of things, I'm sure he would compliment you in his mind.”

“Mother, how was the taste?”

“The cute look and proper seasoning I might get addicted.”

“Master loves the takoyaki's from this place.”

“Yurika, why don't you just receive a takoyaki from Maki you too.”

“I can't. I bought those for Maki-chan.”

A growling sound could be heard.

“...Just have some. I can't let you have that sloppy look on your face.”

“Are you sure, Maki-chan!? I knew you were a good person from the first day we met!!”

“That's definitely a lie. You get so carried away, Yurika-chan... fufufu.”

Elfaria and the girls cheerfully chatted away. The bright atmosphere them was even a match for the midsummer sun.

Considering the battle last time, I can forgive something like this...

Koutarou was worried about everyone letting their guard down, but he felt it was great that Elfaria and the girls were having fun.

That's why he paid extra attention to his surroundings in place of them. What Koutarou had to protect now wasn't just Elfaria.

Part 7

After Elfaria had soaked in the city atmosphere around the train station, they all headed towards Kitsushouharukaze high school. Elfaria wanted to see the school where Theia and Koutarou studied. While she couldn't enter it because they were in the middle of summer vacation, Elfaria looked at the schoolhouse and around the schoolyard with great interest. Seeing Elfaria like that, Koutarou felt like she really was a mother.

Once that was over with, the group climbed up the hill, reaching the ruins where Koutarou worked at his part-time job. This was because Elfaria was an archeologist herself. Of course she was also interested in the place where the legendary Blue Knight worked.

“Elle, everything inside this building are things excavated from these ruins. According to the group leader, this is only about 10% of it.”

Koutarou first guided her to an exhibition hall that was built up next to the excavation site. It was a temporary prefabricated building, but as the excavation had dragged on, there was a surprising amount of artifacts on display.

“So these are the remnants of an ancient civilization on Earth... Reios-sama, how old are these?”

“Supposedly 10,000 years. They did dating on carbon or something on the earthenware. I don't really get it.”

“So they determined the age using the radiocarbon dating method. Then the date should be roughly correct.”

Elfaria looked at each of the artifacts on exhibit. To Koutarou they were just fragments of jars and arrowheads, but Elfaria had sparkles in her eyes. Having been a passionate archeologist before becoming empress, this place was like heaven to Elfaria. Even more so as this was the ancient civilization of a foreign planet.

“But... this is strange. If this level of civilization existed 10,000 years ago then Earth's civilization should be even more advanced by now. The numbers don't add up.”

Elfaria tilted her head. Comparing the artifacts to Forthorthe's civilization, Earth's civilization should be a few thousand years further ahead. This was strange to Elfaria.

“Was it a large-scale disaster? Or where they wiped out in a war...?”

“I'm surprised you can tell, Elle. The higher ups are currently arguing about that. Why wasn't this advanced civilization inherited.”

“I thoughts so... so did they reach a conclusion?”

“No. There are supposedly no signs of natural disasters or wars. So it must have been a closed off society or they were wiped out by an epidemic. At least that's what they're discussing now.”

“What interesting ruins. I kind of want to excavate them myself.”

“Hey now.”

“Fufufu... by the way, Reios-sama, what is this?”

“Ah, this is—”

Elfaria and Koutarou actively discussed as they looked through the exhibit. Since this was regarding her beloved archeology she seemed very happy. There was noone around her that could follow her when she talked about archeology, on that point, Koutarou, who worked on an excavation site had some knowledge about this, so he was the perfect person for Elfaria to talk with. Because his knowledge was imperfect, Elfaria became more talkative.

PART 8

The other girls watched over Koutarou and Elfaria from afar. It was hard to join in on the topic they were discussing and there was a strange atmosphere between them that they didn't want to break.

“Theia-chan, Satomi-kun and Her Majesty met while he was returning from the past, right?”

“Yes. Supposedly they came across my mother when they left to buy some parts they needed.”

“But I feel like that doesn't explain this atmosphere around them.”

Many shared Shizuka's doubts.

Koutarou and Elfaria had met once before 20 years ago, and they had reunited just recently. But the atmosphere they created for something like that was too distinct. It was also different from the atmosphere with Kiriha who had a similar experience.

“Clan-sama knows more of the details around that, but...”

Ruth said and the girls all looked at Clan. In response she simply shook her head and spoke.

"...No comments."

"Why? Don't be such a cheapskate and tell us."

"Her Majesty is living a life less free than ours. I can't tell you what she's feeling, but it is certain that she can't live as she please. So at least leave her be for the time being."

Clan knew that Elfaria had fallen for Koutarou 20 years ago. But she didn't know if that was still the case now. However, even if it was, those feelings were unacceptable seeing as she was the empress and Theia's mother. That's why Clan's way of expressing her friendship was to ask the others to leave it be for now.

"Hmm. Aren't you cool, glasses."

Sensing sincerity from Clan's words, Sanae smiled. She didn't understand the circumstances, but she could vaguely understand that Clan was correct. When she had been a ghost there was a time when Sanae had worried that she would not be able to be together with Koutarou. So if Elfaria truly did love Koutarou, Sanae could imagine how she felt. Because of that, she decided to leave Elfaria be.

"Mother's feelings, huh..."

That was something Theia hadn't thought of. It wasn't hard to imagine that her mother had strong interest for the Blue Knight, having been an archeologist.Depending on the circumstances she might actually have fallen for Koutarou. But Theia was still too young to be able to understand how Elfaria must have felt when she

sent her daughter to his side and when she was able to speak to him again.

“Regardless of the truth, I don't think it's a mistake to give them some time since they've reunited for the first time in 20 years.”

Harumi wrapped up the conversation. She might feel the way she did because of Alaia's feelings inside of her.

“I think so too. Besides, you don't poke around in another woman's feelings.”

Maki agreed with Harumi. Maki was the only one to say so, but many of the girls felt the same way. Elfaria couldn't spend every day with Koutarou like they could. So they could at least let her do as she wished on days like these.

PART 9

Koutarou and Elfaria were looking at the various exhibits, but she suddenly stopped in front of one of them.

This is...?

There was something among the artifacts that had caught her eye. It was a slab some dozen centimeters long on all sides with some kind of pattern carved into the surface. Elfaria felt like she had seen that pattern somewhere before.

It looks similar to one of Forthorthe’s family crests... but what family was it now again? Uhm...

This slab had caught her interest because the pattern carved on it resembled a Forthorthe family crest. However, it wasn't completely

in Forthorthe-style as it looked like the design had a more collapsed feeling overall. As a result, she couldn't clearly recall what family crest it reminded her of.

“What is it?”

“No... it's nothing. I think it was just my imagination.”

In the end, Elfaria decided that it was probably just her imagination. It just happened to be that a slab excavated from ruins 10,000 years ago had a similar pattern to a Forthorthe family crest. Thinking about it normally, it was just a coincidence.

“Fufu.”

Koutarou giggled a little at Elfaria. Confused, she looked up at him and tilted her head. She had now completely forgotten about the slab.

“What's wrong?”

“It's just that when you're thinking, you have the face of an empress, Elle.”

While Koutarou's answer surprised Elfaria for a moment, she soon smiled.

“It's not a face I'd like to show you though, Reios-sama.”

“Maybe so. Being empress just barely doesn't suit you and Theia.”

“If you are aware of that, then I think I you could be a fine emperor.”

Koutarou thought to himself as he looked at Elfaria smile.

Realistically speaking, being an empress didn't suit Elfaria and Theia. Kindness and hesitation existed in their hearts. As empress they sometimes had to push those feelings aside and make a decision.

“Don't push that kind of responsibility onto me.”

“Oh? I became empress when I was around your age. Fufufu.”

But he also felt like it was the opposite. The qualities an empress needed were not suited for an empress. When making that a decision would hurt a person's dignity, the love within Elfaria and Theia would surely minimize that wound.

PART 10

Koutarou had continuously kept watch over the surroundings, but the girls quickly noticed that and had him take a break while they took his place. They had plenty of people as guards and he had heard that the efficiency would drop without taking breaks, so there was nothing Koutarou could say.

“Alright, next is that!”

“Shooting huh. You're ten years too early to challenge me to that!”

“Fufufu, I know how to shoot! There is no way I could lose!”

“I don't know about that. Fufufu.”

“Ahahaha.”

Koutarou and Theia headed towards the shooting stall. Koutarou and the others were currently in a festival at Kitsushou shrine. Elfaria wanted to come into contact with more of Earth's culture and requested to visit this place, and Koutarou's and Theia's break just happened to be at the same time. So the two wandered around the festival looking at stalls.

“If you'd like I can give you a handicap.”

“I don't need any! I'll show you the power of your master!”

The two pressed their shoulders against each other as they aimed their guns and fired.

The guns used at the shooting stall used springs and air pressure to fire corks. The make was half-assed and the barrel was distorted. As a result, the fired corks didn't fly where they aimed.

“The one to understand the quirk of their gun will win... in that case, victory is assured!”

After firing one shot, Theia was convinced of her victory.

While there was no major difference between her and Koutarou's overall combat capabilities, Theia had an overwhelming advantage when it came to shooting. In truth, after a single shot, she was starting to get a grasp of the gun.

“You're too naïve, Theia! Shooting isn't determined by skill alone!”

“What!?”

Koutarou leaned his body forward over the stall's counter. Since there was only a few meters between the targets and the counter,

just leaning forward was enough to greatly close in the distance. Doing that shortened the distance, making the shooting much more accurate. Koutarou used his physique to make up for his lack of skill.

“Alright, that's some chocolate!”

“Curse you, Koutarou and your big body!”

Theia on the other hand had a small body, and even if she leaned forward she wouldn't get as close as Koutarou. She would have to make up for their physical difference using her skill.

“Alright!”

“You're pretty good, Theia!”

“A Forthorthe princess can't lose!”

Koutarou and Theia fired shot after shot as they argued. Right now the only thing that mattered to them was beating the other. Everything else had escaped from their mind.

PART 11

Koutarou and Theia were still making noise. Meanwhile, Theia's vassal, Ruth, and her mother, Elfaria watched over the two.

“Koutarou. You're my vassal so you should show me some more love!”

“That and this is different! I'm someone who doesn't hold back in games!”

Koutarou and Theia were still clashing in front of them. While they shared a strong bond between them, they still clashed quite often. Especially so when it came to games and play, and sometimes their arguments would turn into fist fights.

“Theia really loves Reios-sama, doesn't she?”

But despite the two clashing, Elfaria kept smiling. She knew that their intense clashing was a sign of affection.

“Yes. Master is special, and Her Highness is not afraid to shower him with love.”

“I am sure meeting someone like that is a wonderful thing.”

“I believe it's just as you say.”

Ruth and Elfaria shared the same opinion. They also knew it was the truth from their own experience. Koutarou was someone they loved, and wanted to be loved by.

“I am sure only Theia can pull of such a harsh way of loving someone.”

“In my case, getting a light flick on the forehead is my limit.”

Ruth wanted a relationship like Theia's. However, because of Ruth's personality, Koutarou didn't treat her like he did Theia. Though they were treated differently, it wasn't like she wasn't being treasured. Koutarou surely valued both equally, the only difference was how he showed it.

“And I'm sure Theia wants to be treasured like you, Ruth.”

“She is always saying that.”

“Fufufu, I thought so...”

Elfaria happily smiled as she looked at Theia and Koutarou. Deep love for Theia resided in her eyes. Feeling that, Ruth once again recognized that Elfaria was Theia's mother. There was also a strong trust on Koutarou within those eyes.

“Your Majesty, you really trust Master, don't you?”

“Of course. Reios-sama is Forthorthe's savior and a legendary figure.”

“No, that's not what I meant. Both Her Highness and I are willing to entrust our lives to Master even if he wasn't the Blue Knight.”

“Ruth...”

Elfaria's eyes opened wide for an instant before she nodded at Ruth with a smile.

“You're right. I too would probably have entrusted Theia to Reios-sama even if he wasn't the Blue Knight. To that strong and kind, yet timid and cowardly Sir Knight...”

Elfaria remembered the appearance of Koutarou suffering to escape from the fate provided for him, and how he desperately tried to protect people despite of it. That was why Elfaria trusted him. She knew his strong and proud heart had been formed from that suffering. Whether Koutarou was the legendary Blue Knight or not wasn't that important of a problem.

Is Her Majesty's trust for Master because he is a knight, or is it because of who he is himself...

Because of Elfaria's strong trust, a certain question popped up in Ruth's mind. Perhaps Elfaria fell for Koutarou 20 years ago. Ruth moved to confirm her suspicion.

"Your Majesty. I am aware that this is impolite bu—"

"Mother, Ruth, come over here!"

However, before Ruth could ask, Theia suddenly appeared and took them with her.

"That Koutarou, he won't hold back even against me! So you two help me too!"

"Oh my."

"I understand. I shall help."

Theia brought the two to a stall where she and Koutarou were having a match. Since Ruth wanted to compete against Koutarou like Theia, she temporarily forgot about her question and answered Theia's request.

"Oh, so you've brought backup."

"Say whatever you like. Thinking about it, I have a huge handicap both in physique and experience."

"I will be of your aid, Your Highness."

“Now that I'm here I won't let Reios-sama do as he pleases. Understood, Theia, Ruth?”

“Yes, Mother!”

“As you wish, Your Majesty!”

And so, Koutarou and the others began playing together. They looked like they were having a lot of fun and they looked less like royalties and knights and more like a daughter together with her mother and two friends. As a result, the festival participants that passed them felt like they were cute but noisy foreigners and nothing more.

PART 12

The match between Koutarou and Theia started off with Koutarou having the advantage. At the shooting stall, he made use of their difference in reach to win, and during their goldfish scooping he showed off his trained skills against the clumsy Theia. However, that didn't continue in the second half. Theia brought in Elfaria and Ruth as reinforcements in an attempt to make a comeback. In the katanuki the careful Ruth had a complete victory. With Elfaria's excellent bargaining abilities she got two extras at the yo-yo fishing. With momentum on her side, Theia won the ring toss, ending their match as an overall win for Theia's side.

“Oohohoho, Koutarou, I wish for some lemonade. Buy three so Ruth and Mother can have some as well!”

“Tsk, getting so full yourself.”

“Koutarou, I will let you have half of mine so don't sulk.”

“Guess I have too... I'm off.”

“Yes, very good.”

While reluctant at first, hearing that Theia would give him half of hers, Koutarou decided to listen to her request and go buy lemonade. He realized that the situation would have been the same regardless of who won. Besides, all of the money he used today was money he had gotten from her as salary. That's why their match was in reality nothing more than the two playing with each other.

“Master, the fireworks will start soon, so don't return here but to the observation deck.”

“Got it.”

“See you soon, Reios-sama.”

“Don't take any detours.”

“Why would I!”

“Come on now. If you don't hurry the fireworks will begin.”

“Whoops.”

“See you soon.”

Theia waved her hand to see Koutarou off, leaving Theia, Ruth and Elfaria alone. More accurately speaking the other seven girls were also around, but they kept some distance to not get in the way of Theia and Elfaria. Once Koutarou was out of sight, they began climbing up the road that led to the observation deck.

PART 13

After climbing up the road from the shrine, Theia and the others reached the observation deck. The view from there was open and they had a commanding view of Kitsushouharukaze city. It was a good spot to watch the upcoming fireworks but because of a lack of public transport and because it wasn't being lit up, the locals didn't use it. But to the girls of room 106 neither of those problems mattered, because of that they were the only ones at the observation deck.

“Mother, this country's technology is behind that of our own, but not so for the fireworks. This country's fireworks are without a doubt superior to that of Forthorthe's, so please enjoy yourself.”

Theia made large gestures with her hands as she pointed towards the night sky. She loved the Japanese fireworks that drew large flowers in the sky and absolutely wanted Elfaria to see it for herself.

“Fufufu, Theia, you really have grown up.”

“Mother?”

However, Elfaria's interest was in Theia. Seeing her mother like that, Theia had a perplexed look on her face.

“The you in the past would have called this planet's technology inferior, you would never admit that the fireworks are superior.”

“That might be true.”

Theia was aware of what Elfaria was pointing out. Thinking back to how she had been when she first met Koutarou she felt embarrassed. If possible, she'd like to lecture her past self.

“Thanks to Koutarou and everyone I was able to become a little more adult.”

However, by piling up those embarrassing things, the current Theia was born. That's why, though she wanted to give herself a lecture, she wouldn't deny how she had been. Theia's frame of mind was complex.

“It's not easy to admit your own imperfections and become tolerant of others. You've made some great friends, Theia.”

“Yes! Everyone here is my precious friends!”

Theia looked at the girls keeping their distance. As she did, the girls smiled and blushed a little. It was an honor to be complemented by the leader of a foreign country and they felt a ticklish feeling when their friend's mother complimented them.

“But your number one is Reios-sama, isn't it?”

“Ah, uhm... yes...”

Theia's face turned redder and redder and her voice grew quiet. It was embarrassing to Theia to have her mother know what boy she loved. Because of that, the girls some distance away couldn't hear her. She then put her hands together and twiddled her fingers as she revealed her feelings to Elfaria.

“...Thanks to him, I have... learned how to love...”

“I understand how you feel. What a wonderful love you've found.”

“Mother...”

Elfaria gently smiled as she listened, causing Theia to let out a sigh of relief. However, as she was feeling relieved, she noticed something about what Elfaria had said.

Mother said 'I understand how you feel'... which means...

Theia returned to her serious expression and stared straight at Elfaria. Though since Elfaria was far taller, she ended up looking up at her.

"Mother, could it be that you fell in love with Koutarou 20 years ago when you first met him?"

Elfaria shrank back for a second as she was faced with Theia's straight eyes and words. Her rich golden hair fluttered ever so slightly. However, Elfaria soon smiled again shook her head.

"...Of course, he is the legendary Blue Knight after all."

"That's not what I meant... I mean as a man."

However, Theia didn't back down. She was already half-convinced. Those words, 'I understand how you feel', had truth in them. She was sure of it.

"There's no way of that. He is 20 years younger than me... even if he is a legendary individual he is not someone I would be in love with."

"I don't believe you! You are forced to say that because of your position!"

"Theia..."

“Please tell me the truth!! Mother, you are still in love with Koutarou aren't you!?”

“That's...”

Elfaria stumbled for words and was unable to answer right away. She didn't speak for several seconds later.

“...Theia, you have nothing to worry about. Reios-sama and my meeting is a thing of the past. There is nothing between us now.”

“...Mother...”

In the end, Elfaria avoided the question. However, Theia couldn't help but feel that Elfaria's long silence before was a sign of the complex feelings she concealed within.

“Theia... you really are a kind girl...”

Elfaria gently embraced Theia who stood still, deep in thought. She was happy that Theia was being so considerate towards her, to the point that tears swelled up in her eyes.

“It's only obvious for a daughter to wish for her mother's happiness.”

“You're right... and I'm digesting that obvious thing right now.”

“...Mother...”

Theia embraced Elfaria right back. Hugging your mother like this was an obvious thing, but oh so happy. The matured Theia thought so especially much. That's why Theia decided to forget that Elfaria had evaded her question for a little while longer.

PART 14

Having bought lemonade and run up the road, Koutarou stopped as he entered the observation deck. He saw Theia and Elfaria hugging each other.

“A mother, huh...”

He had seen Elfaria and Theia together countless times but this was the first time he had ever seen Elfaria do something directly motherly.

“Master, you're here.”

Noticing Koutarou standing still, Ruth walked up to him. She also felt like she shouldn't get in the way of Theia and Elfaria, and upon noticing Koutarou she purposefully walked towards him to distance herself from the mother and daughter.

“...”

However, despite Ruth being right next to him, Koutarou stood still doing nothing.

“Master?”

Confused, Ruth called out to him again, and this time he finally noticed her.

“Ah, Ruth-san.”

“Is something the matter?”

“Well nothing is really the matter... I was just surprised over something so obvious, that Elle has become a mother.”

Koutarou had a bitter smile on his face as he gave Ruth one of the bottles of lemonade. Ruth observed Koutarou's expression as she received the bottle. As she did, she couldn't imagine that he was just surprised.

“Master, you are longing for your lost mother, aren't you?”

“That's hard to answer as a man... but it'd be a lie if I said those feelings didn't exist.”

Koutarou honestly acknowledged Ruth's suspicion. They didn't have a relationship shallow enough where he had to lie about his mother.

“Honestly, I'm a bit jealous of Theia.”

“That's an obvious emotion for people. There are times when I long for my parents on Forthorthe.”

“But it's not cool, so could you not tell the others?”

“Yes.”

Just as Ruth responded with a small smile and a nod.

Along with a loud bang, a large flower bloomed in the night sky. The flower burned for a couple of seconds before vanishing. While it might not have been the biggest, it was a comparably large firework. The fireworks show was beginning.

“Mother, it's started!”

“My... the fireworks in this country really do look like flowers.”

As fireworks began being launched, Theia and Elfaria separated. Leaning over on the observation deck's handrail, the two looked up at the sky together.

“Hey, Theia, Elle! I've bought lemonade!”

“Ah, you've kept me waiting, Koutarou.”

“Sorry for the troubles, Reios-sama.”

Koutarou ran up to Theia and Elfaria. He had held back before as they were hugging, but there was no need to hold back any longer.

“You should be grateful, you two.”

“Yes, of course. I should be the only one in history to have the Blue Knight run errands for me.”

“What's with that weird expression of gratitude.”

“I am always thankful for you, Reios-sama.”

“There's definitely something behind that gratitude of yours.”

“Oh my.”

Like that, Koutarou, Theia and Ruth began chatting. If everything went as Ruth wished, Koutarou and Theia would eventually marry, and this kind sight would become a daily occurrence. If that happened, Elfaria would become Koutarou's—

“Ah...”

That was when Ruth noticed something.

“...Could Her Majesty be...”

That something was Elfaria's true goal.

Maybe Elfaria was trying to do something that none of the other girls around Koutarou could do. And for that sake, she might be trying to get Theia and Koutarou together. That was what Ruth began suspecting.

If Theia and Koutarou were to marry, a secondary relationship would appear. Something that none of the other nine girls could do, only Elfaria.

And that is becoming Koutarou's mother.

If the two were to marry, Elfaria would become Koutarou's mother in both name and reality. That might be the best possible way to heal Koutarou's heart. Only Elfaria had the ability to become someone special to Koutarou without the two becoming lovers or marrying.

“...But... to think...”

There was no definitive proof.

However, Ruth was convinced that this was something Elfaria might try.

Elfaria also had a strong motive to try it as well.

The Secret Agreement at the Amusement Park

PART 1

Monday, August 23

Unlike the girls of room 106 who were enjoying their summer vacation, Koutarou was busy with his part-time job.

However, since Koutarou was receiving his Knight's salary from Theia, he didn't actually have to work. Totaling up all of the money he had received from Theia so far, he had enough to buy a small house.

However, Koutarou had no intention of using that money for himself. He would save it up and use it for everyone when they went out to play. He didn't have it in him to see the salary he had gotten out of his relationship with Theia as actual money. It didn't feel right to him to see the money he had gotten from Theia turning into instant noodles or toilet paper. However, he didn't feel any resistance if that money was used so everyone could have fun. He felt it was natural that something appeared from a relationship should be used for relationships.

So, Koutarou continued his part-time job despite having a vast fortune for a high school student. The girls around him laughed at him for only being able to live so awkwardly. However, while they laughed, they loved that awkward side of him, because they knew that him continuing his part-time job was his roundabout of treasuring them. Knowing that, the girls didn't stop him from working, they simply watched over him with smiles.

“Koutarou, it's your turn.”

“Ok.”

Koutarou slowly reached out to throw his die before moving his own piece the amount of steps the die showed. Koutarou was currently playing a board game with Sanae, Yurika, Kiriha and the two haniwas. They had already finished everything for today and were currently killing the time until it was bedtime by playing a game.

“It says to draw an event card.”

The objective of the board game was to escape from an old European manor. Many of the accidents in the manor were decided by event cards. The space that Koutarou's piece had stopped on had instructions to draw such a card.

“Then take this.”

“Thanks.”

Koutarou drew a card from the pile of event cards that Kiriha presented to him.

“What did you get?”

“Uhm... 'You broke down a wall and are attacked by a zombie. You can fend it off by discarding a weapon card. If you don't discard, or can't discard, you are chased around by the zombie and lose a turn'.”

“What will you do Ho?”

“Zombies are scary Ho.”

“I don't have any weapon cards. Guess I'm sitting out a turn. Haaah...”

Koutarou glanced at his hand and shook his hand. The next moment he let out a loud yawn. It was getting late and he was exhausted from work, so Koutarou was getting really tired.

“Next is Karama-chan.”

“Brother, the die Ho.”

“Be careful Ho. There are monsters everywhere in this manor Ho!”

“HoHo-!!”

“The haniwas are really into it.”

“They're probably happy because they usually only get to watch.”

Once Koutarou's turn was over, the turns moved from the haniwas, to Yurika, to Kiriha and to Sanae before returning to him. However, since he was skipping a turn he had to wait for another round. The game continued for another round and passed over to Koutarou once more.

“...”

“Koutarou, hey.”

“Looks like he's fallen asleep.”

“While exploring the manor, Koutarou lost to drowsiness Ho-”

“Nice feeling Ho-”

“I'm sure he's tired. He's working his part-time job and playing with us.”

Having sat out a turn, Koutarou had fallen asleep. Waking him up once he's fallen asleep was no easy task and the girls also had a gist of why he fell asleep to begin with. That's why no one in the room tried to wake him up.

“Alright, Koutarou's asleep but let's continue!”

“That's more like it Ho-!”

“This adventure doesn't end yet Ho-!”

“With Satomi-san dropping out, the last place goes to him. Now I really want to keep going.”

The game continued as if nothing happened. With Koutarou being in such a deep sleep, waking him up would be hard work. So fortunately there was no fear of accidentally waking him up by being noisy. There was no worry of causing trouble for Koutarou by continuing.

“You guys continue, I'll properly put Koutarou to sleep.”

“Okay~, then it's Karama-chan's turn again.”

“Fu fu fu, I will show you my luckiness Ho!”

“...Karama, you were lucky Ho?”

“It's most exciting if we put it like that Ho.”

“Show them your luck Ho, Karama!”

“The haniwas are getting more and more influenced by the manga and anime of the surface.”

Leaving the game to the haniwas, Sanae and Yurika, Kiriha began taking care of Koutarou. After putting down a futon by the edge of the room, she dragged him all the way to it. With no strength in his body, it was easy to drag him along the grain of the tatami.

You’re sleeping completely defenseless... we’re invaders you know? Aren’t you scared we’ll do something terrible?

Kiriha pulled a blanket over Koutarou and quietly watched his sleeping face. It was a loose face without any sense of caution. Seeing that, Kiriha smiled and gently patted his cheek. As she did, she could feel his warmth through her palm. Happy by that sensation she continued patting his cheek over and over.

What would you do if I were to kiss you while you sleep? I’m one thing, but Kii doesn’t have that kind of restraint... fufu, fufufufu...

While Koutarou had a surprisingly lack of caution towards the invaders, those invaders were deeply in love with him. Both sides were strange. That's why Kiriha continued to smile.

PART 2

After putting Koutarou in his futon, Kiriha returned to the tea table and rejoined the game. They continued playing until they finished. First place was Sanae, second was Karama, third was Kiriha, fourth was Korama and Yurika was fifth. Since Koutarou ended up falling asleep, Yurika was the actual last place.

“Fuh fuuu~h♪ I'll be able to sleep great toda~y♪”

Despite being the actual last place, Yurika was in a great mood. She happily hummed as she opened the wardrobe and climbed up to the upper half which she was using as her room. The game they had played was incredibly enjoyable to her. With Koutarou retiring, Yurika could enjoy the game without worrying about getting last place. This was the ideal end for her.

“Goo~d niii~ght♪”

The cheerful Yurika was planning on turning in early. Since she was unfortunate most of the time, she had begun going to bed early whenever something good happened. That had become her life philosophy.

“Good night.”

Sanae seeing Yurika off was somewhat dissatisfied. The contrasting behavior was as if Sanae had taken last place and Yurika first.

“What is it Sanae?”

After Yurika had closed the sliding door of the wardrobe Kiriha called out to Sanae. She naturally grew concerned as the normally cheerful and innocent Sanae showed a wry face.

“I was wondering how I should punish Koutarou for going to sleep and forgetting about this beautiful Sanae-chan.”

Sanae's dissatisfaction was with Koutarou. To her, it was his duty to praise her when she got first place. Neglecting his obligation and going to sleep was a major sin.

“So, did you decide on what to do?”

“Yeah, I've decided to think about it tomorrow.”

“That's not deciding on anything, you're just putting off for later.”

“But it's boring to decide on something when Koutarou is sleeping.”

Strictly speaking, Sanae just wanted Koutarou to dote on her. Yet he had gone to sleep, not doing anything for her.

“Well, it's not like I don't understand how you feel.”

Kiriha had a mischievous side to her and she also found it dull that Koutarou had gone to sleep. Unlike Sanae however, it was because she wanted to dote on Koutarou.

“Well then, I'm going to sleep as well.”

“Yeah, good night.”

“Good night.”

After saying her good night, Sanae put on her favorite nightcap. The nightcap had a similar design to a Santa cap and fit the innocent and bright Sanae perfectly.

“Geez, that Koutarou...”

Sanae muttered her complaints as she approached Koutarou. He was currently sleeping on his side and Sanae approached him from his front.

“And there.”

Sanae laid down in front of Koutarou and pushed her back against his chest. She then pulled his arm forward and wrapped her body around it.

“That should do it.”

Having confirmed Koutarou's and her own positions, she nodded with satisfaction and closed her eyes. She was planning on sleeping in this position where she was being hugged from behind. When she was a ghost she used to sleep inside of Koutarou, so this kind of intimate position seemed natural to her.

"...I sometimes get envious of that innocent boldness of yours..."

"Did you say something?"

"No, nothing. Good night, Sanae."

"Good night."

Kiriha started leaving room 106 as she stared at the two. As she wondered how she could do the same thing she left for her own room underneath room 106.

PART 3

The next morning, Ruth instinctively smiled as she arrived in room 106. The reason for that was because both Koutarou and Sanae were sleeping on their backs with their arms and legs stretched out. The two of them sleeping in the exact same position was quite humorous, and to Ruth it looked like it reflected the two's relationship perfectly.

After looking at the two for a while, Ruth headed towards the kitchen, and as she began preparing breakfast, Sanae who was sensitive to the presence of others woke up. She sleepily rubbed her eyes and slowly entered the kitchen.

"Good morning."

"Good morning to you."

Figuring that she must be tired as the season was still midsummer, Ruth gave Sanae a glass of water as she greeted her.

"Have some water."

“Thank you, Ruth.”

“I see you stayed over last night.”

“Yeah. You know Koutarou— Ah, that's right!”

Sanae hurriedly drank up her water and swiftly ran back into the inner room. Her goal was to wake up Koutarou and complain about yesterday.

“My...”

Surprised by the sudden change in Sanae's behavior, Ruth stood there wide eyed for a moment before giggling and returning to her work. The menu for today was ham, egg, salad, miso soup and rice.

Having been woken up by Sanae, Koutarou wasn't sure why she was angry at him at first, but after listening for a while he understood what she was saying.

“I'm sorry for falling asleep half ways through.”

“That doesn't matter! I'm more concerned about you neglecting your most important job, which is to praise me when I win!”

“That's your problem!?”

“What other problems could there be?”

“Normally, falling asleep part way through the game would be the problem.”

“But you've been tired lately right? I'd feel sorry for you if I said you couldn't sleep.”

“Then I could just praise you later right?”

“No way. You spoiling me is the mission given to you by the heavens itself.”

“I don't really get it, but... congratulations on your victory. That's just what I'd expect from the beautiful and adorable Sanae-chan.”

“Hm, very well.”

After praising Sanae, Koutarou began patting her head. Having sensed it coming, she presented her head to him, making it extremely easy to pat. Sanae loved the back and forth before getting her head patted. It was her favorite game.

“Then following up, as an extra reward you'll be taking me to the amusement park you bastard.”

“Can't you ask normally?”

“I'm bored so lets go play at the amusement park!”

“Just say that from the start. You really are a handful.”

“Ehehehe~”

After letting out an embarrassed laugh, Sanae looked up at Koutarou. Her eyes were full of expectation. Having Sanae look up at him with that kind of look in her eyes was one of Koutarou's weaknesses. He couldn't refuse when her eyes were sparkling like that.

“Okay, okay. Let's go to the amusement park.”

“Really!? Alright!! Thank you, Koutarou!!”

“So when do we go?”

“Today!”

“That's awfully sudden. Everyone might be busy.”

“Then that's fine. We can just go again when everyone has time. It's not like it's a place where one day is enough.”

“That's an optimistic outlook.”

“Sanae-chan's method is to do fun things as many times as possible.”

“Yeah, that way sounds more fun.”

Koutarou decided to go to the amusement park with Sanae. He would invite those who were free today.

“Koutarou, Sanae, may I join too?”

The nearby Kiriha expressed her desire to participate. The amusement park they would be going to had the roller coaster that Kiriha loved. Since she'd love nothing more than to ride that whenever she had the chance, she wouldn't overlook this chance.

“Yeah, let's go together! It's more fun with more people! The haniwas should come too!”

“Let's go Ho-! We'll play Ho-!”

“We don't have to hide there so I love it Ho-!”

Of course Sanae welcomed this. While it might be fun to go with just Koutarou, she wanted to have fun with more people. If Kiriha was coming so would the haniwas, bringing up the participants to five.

PART 4

While Kiriha would join, nobody else could. Theia and Ruth had something else to do, Yurika was abducted by the cosclub a moment ago, Shizuka and Maki had made a promise to go hang out with some classmates, and Harumi and Clan had to continue the health check up from yesterday. As a result, Koutarou would be going out with Sanae, Kiriha and the haniwas.

“Since it's just us I've decided to pad out the numbers.”

“Sanae-chan, one of us is enough.”

After leaving room 106, Sanae-chan left her body and was floating in the air alongside the haniwas. This was her way of showing her consideration, but to Sanae-san left behind in the body, this was a trial.

“You need to get used to this.”

“That's impossible... you're always taking the courage with you, Sanae-chan.”

“Well that's because it's mine. You need to squeeze out your own courage. Stop relying on me.”

“But...”

Having only known Koutarou and the others for a short while, Sanae-san still wasn't sure how to act around them. On top of that, Sanae-chan's personality was usually on the surface, and the introverted Sanae-san couldn't really rely on the bright and cheerful Sanae-chan's memories. Sanae-san was still getting a feel for things.

“Koutarou, how about you hold Sanae-san's hand?”

“That's it! Thank you, Kiriha! We should just force her to get used to it!”

“Eeeehh!?”

The Sanaes were split on Kiriha's proposal. Sanae-chan was up for it but Sanae-san was against it. The difference in their personalities was showing.

“...So what should I do?”

Koutarou was of course troubled by that. While he had no objections of holding Sanae's hand, since both of them were the same person, he didn't want to ignore Sanae-san's opinion.

“Koutarou, Koutarou, it's not like she doesn't like you. She's me after all.”

“Kya Kya Kya! Stop it, Sanae-chan!!”

“She likes you so she's embarrassed to hold hands. Isn't she childish?”

“You look more like a child to me though...”

Since the two were the same person, Sanae-chan and Sanae-san shared the same memories and basic thinking. That's why both of them liked Koutarou. However, their expression of that emotion change based on the environment they grew up in.

“So there you have, just grab her hand.”

“N-No way!”

“Do you hate Koutarou?”

“That's not it, but... it's still too early! It's not even been half a year since we met.”

“You're so immature... geez...”

Their personalities were so difference, Sanae was amazed by herself.

“I've come up with a good idea, Sanae.”

“What?”

“How about you hold Karama's and Korama's hands first? I'm sure it'll be a lot easier mentally than starting off with the person you love the most.”

“We'll cooperate Ho-!”

“But don't fall for us Ho-!”

Karama and Korama spun around Sanae-san. Since the two of them loved Sanae, they would gladly cooperate.

“I-In that case, I might manage somehow...”

“I guess it can't be helped... please, haniwas.”

“Leave it to us Ho-!”

“We're full of love Ho-!”

Karama and Korama floated up into the air and held hands with Sanae-san. The next moment they concealed themselves using their camouflage, but Sanae-san could still feel their small hands in her own.

“Alright, I'll do my best...”

With her withdrawn personality she would never be able to leave Sanae-chan's shadow. That would become an obstacle if the two were to completely merge. That's why Sanae-san decided to try her hardest today.

PART 5

Koutarou and the others took the train towards their destination for today. As they rode towards the ocean, the first thing they saw by the coastline was the ferris wheel. The biggest attraction of them all stood out the most. Next they could see the roller coaster. Kiriha was particularly fond of that attraction.

“Oh yeah, Koutarou, we made a promise to ride the roller coaster after the commotion underground settled down.”

As they could see the roller coast past the window, Kiriha smiled at Koutarou. Before the decisive battle with the radical faction, Koutarou had promised the nervous Kiriha that they would ride the roller coaster after everything was over. Those words served to support Kiriha during the fierce battle. That's why Kiriha wasn't

planning on leaving the amusement park without riding the roller coaster.

“I remember. That's what I was planning from the point the amusement park was brought up.”

Of course, Koutarou hadn't forgotten. Always upholding his promises was his creed. Especially so towards those special to him, like the girls of room 106.

“Koutarou, if you're a man make sure to fulfill your promises.”

Sanae who had listened in on the conversation poked Koutarou with her elbow, with a mannerism as if to say that those who don't fulfill their promises are the worst.

“I know. I'm a man after all.”

“Alright!! Karama-chan, Korama-chan, we're going to ride on the roller coaster!!”

“I can't wait Ho-!”

“I love going round and round Ho-!”

“...You're more interested in riding it yourself than in me keeping my promise...”

The Sanae and the cloaked haniwas rejoiced. It might have been a strange sight to others, but not when Koutarou and Kiriha were with them. Sanae and the haniwas began discussing the attractions as they stared out the window. At the same time Kiriha began talking to Koutarou again.

“By the way, Koutarou.”

Since she only wanted Koutarou to hear, she spoke in a quiet voice, almost whispering.

“Hm?”

“When we went there last year... do you remember that other promise?”

“A year ago? What?”

“Fufufu... you really are unconcerned with promises others make...”

Koutarou always tried to fulfill promises he made with others, but he didn't demand the same from others. The girls had let him know that this was because he didn't expect things from others, but it was a habit that was hard to lose.

“I'm trying to be careful, but it's not that easy.”

“Back then, I promised you that in return for helping me find my first love, I would introduce you to a cute underground girl.”

“Ah, right, I remember you talking about something like that.”

Koutarou recalled when he went out to play with Kiriha last autumn. Back then, he had struck that kind of deal with Kiriha to cheer her up. Kiriha agreed, and a promise was made. Since Koutarou only wanted to help Kiriha, he had completely forgotten about it.

“Now is the time to fulfill that promise.”

“Eh? But I don't really—”

—need that, is what Koutarou was about to say. Koutarou already have Kiriha, Sanae and several others precious to him. There was no need to introduce him to someone else. But before he could say that, Kiriha placed her slender finger on his lips, not letting him continue.

“I'll be introducing you to the daughter of the Kurano family. Since the Kurano family is a distinguished family with over a thousand year long history, she should be perfect for you.”

“Hey, isn't that—”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide. The daughter of the Kurano family was none other than Kiriha herself. Having found her first love and with the situation underground calming down, Kiriha decided to introduce herself.

“Her name is Kurano Kiriha. She is 17 years old, just like you. I don't mind if it's just to play, but I wish you two stay together happily ever after.”

Kiriha smiled innocently. It was as if she really was introducing him to a friend.

“Kiriha-san.”

“Yes?”

Kiriha slightly tilted her head, placing it on Koutarou's shoulder. The gesture was incredibly natural, as if she had been doing so for years on end. Seeing her like that, Koutarou swallowed his own words.

"...It's nothing. I was just thinking that I should get along well with her since you've introduced us."

"I'll be happy if you do too. It means my efforts in introducing you weren't for nothing."

"You would... go that far for me, huh."

"I love you after all, or is that not enough?"

"...No. I'm probably confused because of my own faults."

Koutarou still didn't fully understand his own heart. The fact that the girls of room 106 were precious to him were no longer beyond doubt, but maybe because of his faults that originated from childhood, he rejected those feelings at the very last moment.

"Koutarou, let's end this difficult topic here. Let's play a lot before we go home today."

"Yeah, let's!"

But even then, another one of Koutarou's mental wounds was closed. Koutarou was happy knowing there were people that would gladly volunteer for that job.

PART 6

Arriving at the amusement park, Koutarou and the others started from one end of the park and rode each and every of the attractions in order. Since there was no reason to go through the entire park in a day, they thoroughly rode everything. There were only a few attractions that they needed to go to. Those were the roller coaster

that was brought up before, and the Kabutonga attraction they would never be able to visit with Ruth around.

“Neo Scarab King sure was strong. But there's no way my Kabutonga would lose.”

“It's ours and Sanae-chan's victory Ho-!”

“Friendship comes out victorious Ho-!”

“Well done, Hercules, Atlas!”

“Ho-!”

“HoHo-!”

Koutarou and the others had just finished visiting that Kabutonga related attraction. It's name was Kabutonga The Ride. It was an experience where you got on a ride to assault the enemy base with guns, shooting the attacking enemies, it was one of the most popular attractions of this amusement park.

The teams were divided into Koutarou and Kiriha, and Sanae and the haniwas. They competed by comparing final score, and the winners were Sanae and the haniwas. With her spiritual powers Sanae had superhuman reflexes, and the haniwas were able to show off the power of the state of the art spiritual energy technology. They obtained todays high score.

“Looks like we lost, Koutarou.”

“It can't be helped, in the end you and I are just ordinary people that can move a little fast.”

While Koutarou and Kiriha had lost, they were satisfied with their result. While they had lost on score, they were still second on the high score board. It was a satisfactory result. They only lost because their opponents were too good.

“I have objections to you calling yourself ordinary.”

“Well that goes both ways.”

“Our talents couldn't be fully used in a simple firefight.”

“Something like that.”

Kiriha was a genius, and Koutarou had some skill with the sword. Neither of them were suited for firefights on vehicles. Even more so as the enemy only attacked in waves.

“No no, we didn't win because of ability or talent.”

“We didn't Ho-!”

“You don't get it Ho-!”

“Our victory comes from our hearts filled with justice and from our bonds of friendship!”

“Justice Ho-!”

“Friendship Ho-!”

Sanae and the haniwas were cheerfully walking in front of Koutarou and Kiriha. Since they won, they got to decide what attraction to ride next, and they were headed for the haunted

mansion. This was an attraction were two people got on a ride together through a haunted mansion.

“Sanae, let's change teams again.”

“Last one was me and Koutarou, so... this time it's me and Kiriha.”

“Let's do our best, Sanae.”

“Yeah!”

“Koutarou, now that it's come to this, you are only hope Ho-!”

“The monsters at the haunted mansion don't show on our sensors and suddenly appear so they're scary Ho-!”

“...That's a surprising weakness you have.”

On attractions where Koutarou and the others couldn't ride all together, having the same groups all the time was boring, so the groups were changed each time. Taking the Kabutonga attraction and the one before that into consideration, this time it was Kiriha and Sanae, and Koutarou and the haniwas. And so the five headed towards the new attraction.

PART 7

Unlike the Kabutonga attraction, the haunted mansion was dim. Karama and Korama didn't need to conceal themselves and they took up position to the left and right of Koutarou.

“Koutarou, there it is Ho-!”

“Save us Ho-!”

The two pressed up against Koutarou and shook. Unlike normal ghosts, the type of monsters that appeared on this attraction which they couldn't sense was something they feared, and they had been clinging on to Koutarou frightened for a while now.

“Like I said, that's not a real ghost.”

“We know that Ho-! It's not about logic Ho!”

“It's the same as being scared of high places Ho! You don't stop being scared of high places even if you have a lifeline Ho-!”

“...I kinda get what you mean. So just leave it to me.”

“You're so reliable Ho-!”

“Brother!”

Like that, the ride in front of Sanae and Kiriha was very lively, but theirs was rather quiet in comparison.

“Hey, Kiriha, how is that being projected into the air?”

“It's probably being displayed on a diagonal, transparent glass panel and that doll is probably drawn behind it.”

“I see, so because a human shape is being reflected off the glass it looks like a real ghost.”

“That's right.”

Having been a ghost just a while back, the haunted mansion didn't scare Sanae at all. However, since she loved surprised, she liked this kind of attraction for a different reason. Moreover, when she left her

body, the haunted mansion could serve as a reference for pranks. So Sanae was quite fascinated in the haunted mansion for two reasons. Ever since the start she had been asking Kiriha how each of the tricks worked.

“Uhm, Kiriha.”

However, as they were around the halfway point of the attraction, the tone of Sanae's voice dropped a little. Kiriha could tell from the change that Sanae was about to bring up a different topic.

“What?”

“Can I ask you about something else? It's just the two of us right now...”

“I don't mind.”

“Thank you.”

Sanae began speaking with a serious expression completely unlike her normal self. It was a more conservative expression that Sanae-san was more likely to show.

“Uhm, Kiriha, do you like Koutarou?”

“Yes, I love him.”

In response to Sanae's reserved question, Kiriha gave a clear answer. She didn't seem all that different from usual. If there was a difference, it was that there was a deep gentleness residing within her eyes.

“How big is that love?”

“Most likely as much as yours.”

“I see... yeah, you would...”

Sanae nodded with a convinced expression. She suspected that was the case. Before she knew it, the aura that Kiriha directed towards Koutarou was no longer that between friends. That was proof that they had the same feelings for Koutarou.

“But, Kiriha.”

“Hm...?”

“Since it's the same, won't it become troublesome in the future?”

“The possibility for that is quite high.”

In what will likely be the distant future, Koutarou's wounded heart will eventually heal. When that happens, Koutarou will be able to truly love others. He would be able to choose someone to be his lover, and they would eventually marry. But when that time came, only one could be chosen. But there were already two here. So there would inevitably be trouble.

“Do you think you could give up, Kiriha?”

“That would be hard. I probably couldn't. What about you?”

“I think it's impossible for me too. I don't want to imagine a life without being able to see Koutarou...”

Koutarou had already become an important existence for the two girls. Having him forcibly torn away from them would bring about

great pain. The two of them wanted to avoid that, but the chance of that happening in the future wasn't small.

“So, Kiriha. Why don't we make a promise?”

“A promise?”

“Yeah. That regardless of if Koutarou chooses me or you, there are no grudges. In return, the one not chosen is allowed to have an affair with Koutarou.”

“...That's an interesting proposal.”

Sanae's proposal was easy to understand. Kiriha was planning on invading Koutarou's life while taking utmost care not to destroy anything, and Sanae's proposal was quite similar to that. And since Sanae's idea would lead to an even more optimal result, it was very interesting to her.

“Since this is Koutarou we're talking about, that affair would probably be just as serious.”

“I don't know about that. He's an awkward man after all.”

“So, what will you do, Kiriha? Will you make the... promise?”

Sanae restrained her unease and asked Kiriha. Since this was a question that would greatly affect their future, Sanae couldn't smile like she always did. The desperation in her eyes shined through.

“Let's promise.”

“Really!?”

“It's not like making that kind of promise is a complete loss for me either after all.”

“Thank you, Kiriha!”

The moment Kiriha said she'd promise, a smile returned to Sanae's face. With a sigh of relief she dropped her shoulders. Since this was one of the most tense moments in her life, the relief she felt was enormous.

“...Aaahh, thank god... with this there's no need to worry about Kiriha for now...”

“We'll eventually need to bring this up to everyone.”

“You're right. That might be for the best.”

Kiriha and Sanae weren't the only ones that cared for Koutarou, and those others who did were irreplaceable to both Kiriha and Sanae. They wanted to avoid any scenario that would make it difficult to look at each other. For that purpose, this promise was a very useful measure.

“But I think it might be better to aim for the opposite.”

“The opposite?”

“Rather than making sure Koutarou can choose anyone, we make it so he can't choose anyone.”

“Not choose anyone... what do you mean?”

“It means getting along with Koutarou even more than now. Doing that would make it next to impossible for Koutarou to choose only one and reject the others.”

“That's a good one.”

“Normally one would make a choice before that happens, but with Koutarou's psychological problems, that choice is being delayed. That's why we should just deepen our bonds before he makes his decision.”

“How would we do that?”

“There's nothing special about it. We only need to act like normal, just by doing that our invasion will advance to the next stage.”

“Hehe, I'm sure Koutarou would be troubled.”

Sanae flashed a small smile. Sanae normally had no intention of bothering Koutarou, but regarding this one point, she needed him to be troubled.

“Yeah. He's a very serious man. If that kind of situation happens, he would be incredibly troubled.”

“But we want him to be troubled. I bet everything would be a lot more fun together.”

“Fortunately, we are invaders. We've had the right to trouble Koutarou since we arrived.”

“Let's do our best to invade.”

“Yeah.”

With their secret discussion over, Sanae and Kiriha exchanged smiles. A year and four months had already passed since the girls invaded Koutarou. And now their invasion was finally about to begin for real. However, it was a large-scale invasion where they would be holding hands.

“Koutarou, save us Ho-!”

“Hoaaaa, if we're important to you, do your best to protect us Ho-!”

“Calm down already! Nothing worse than that will happen!”

“You don't know that Ho-!”

“Don't be so irresponsible Ho-!”

“Owaaaaaaa!!”

Koutarou didn't know anything.

He had no clue of the frightening plans being formed by the invaders behind him, and that what he himself was vaguely noticing was about to become a reality.

PART 8

After Koutarou and the others got out of the haunted mansion attraction they were wrapped in the red light of the evening sun. The sun would be setting soon. It was time to think about going home.

“Kiriha, the day is almost over.”

“Then we should head back soon.”

“Alright, so let's go for that one before we go.”

“You're right, let's ride that one before we go.”

“Koutarou, let's go.”

“Y-Yeah.”

Before Koutarou and the others headed home, they would enjoy one final attraction. While they hadn't mentioned its name, everyone headed towards it. They all already knew what it was.

“Koutarou, we have decided to follow you Ho!”

“Ane-san was right Ho-, you're a man that we can rely on when needed Ho!”

“I-I see. I'm glad I was of use.”

“What a modest man Ho-!”

“As expected of Big Brother Ho!”

“It looks like Koutarou and the haniwas are getting along better.”

“Something must have happened at the haunted mansion.”

“Ehehe, just like with us.”

“Looks like it, fufu.”

The five cheerfully chatted as they headed towards the attraction. As they walked, they got closer to a certain huge structure. Metallic rails supported by a strong frame. On top of it were metallic

vehicles riding along the rails at frightening speeds. It was the always popular roller coaster.

“Hey, Kiriha, we should go too.”

“Yeah, let's do so.”

About 100 meters away from the roller coaster terminal, Sanae and Kiriha smiled and nodded at each other before running up to Koutarou.

“Koutarou, Koutarou!”

“Ei!”

The two ran up to Koutarou from different sides and each grabbed one of Koutarou's arms, pressing their bodies against them. Sanae took the right arm and Kiriha took the left. Both of them drew closer to Koutarou like lovers.

“H-Hey...”

Koutarou was confused by the girls' sudden action. Not sure what to do, he stood there, at a loss for words and eyes wide open.

“Aren't you lucky Koutarou! You get to get along with two cute girls!”

“Nobody is looking, so act as you please, Koutarou.”

“Wow, Kiriha, you're so bold!”

“You guys... what's up with you all of a sudden?”

Koutarou couldn't hide his surprise from Sanae and Kiriha doing this kind of thing at the same time. While they had done similar things individually, this was the first time they had acted at the same time.

“Nothing's up. Both Kiriha and I just love you.”

“Isn't this normal? Is our relationship so shallow that you can't forgive something like this?”

“Well, that's not it but...”

Koutarou didn't have a shallow relationship with neither Sanae nor Kiriha. Up until now, the girls had just been holding back for one another. But now they no longer had any reason to do so, and there were no people around.

I'm sure something happened between them...

That's what Koutarou thought as he looked at the two. They must have made some form of agreement, that's why they took action at the same time. Up until now, they had shown consideration to others. Just as Koutarou began thinking more about that the haniwas hugged his head from each side.

“Koutarou, get along better with us too Ho-!”

“We don't want to be left out Ho-!”

Since the haniwas were so noisy, Koutarou decided to stop thinking for now.

“We can't lose to them Kiriha!”

“Ei!”

“H-Hey! Stop clinging onto me!”

“Now now, we know you're happy~”

“Koutarou is surprisingly pure and shy.”

“You're only playing around.”

“Ah, he found out.”

“As expected of Koutarou.”

“Ho-”

“HoHo-”

The five noisily chatted away as they disappeared into the roller coaster terminal. They still had some time before the sun set. Their special time would continue for a little while longer.

Ending Summer Vacation and Never Ending Homework

PART 1

Monday, August 30

The problem revealed itself on August 30.

“I-I forgot my homewooork!!”

The problem in question was Yurika's summer homework. Being a normal high schooler, Yurika had been given homework over the summer. Moreover, the summer vacation would only last for two more days. It would be difficult to complete all of the homework before the vacation ended.

“Please help me, Satomi-san! I haven't done any of my homework!”

“Wait a minute, Yurika, you've been studying every day!! And you haven't done anything!?”

“Those were the drills you bought for me! Because I was studying every day I forgot I had homework to do!”

“Whaaat!?”

Yurika had forgotten about her homework because of her everyday studying.

A while back, Yurika started wanting to properly study. She wanted to go to the same university as Koutarou and Harumi. With a clear goal, Yurika's motivation flared up. Since she was showing motivation, Koutarou was teaching her. He wasn't that

knowledgeable himself, but Yurika was just so incompetent that even he could serve as her teacher.

Yurika was currently studying the material of a few school years beneath hers. Koutarou's decision was that the basics were important. Yurika was taking this seriously and studied every day. Thanks to that, her scholastic attainments were improving and she was now completely different from what she had been last year.

However, that proved to be a pitfall. Since she studied every day, nobody could have suspected that she hadn't even touched her homework, not even Yurika herself. As she completed the drills and problems Koutarou prepared for her, she convinced herself she had done her homework. As she went through her backpack in preparations for the new semester she found her homework, completely blank.

“Please help me, Satomi-san!”

“I want to help, but... I still haven't finished my own.”

In regards of this failure, Yurika wasn't at fault. Yurika was properly studying after all. It would be cruel to blame Yurika for a simple miss, and she had been studying so ardently. Koutarou would love to help, but he still hadn't completed his own homework.

“Work on your own for now. I'll come help once I'm done with my own.”

“Please do... you're my only hope right now.”

So, Yurika began the difficult undertaking of completing her summer vacation all alone in just two days.

PART 2

The remaining time was a mere two days. The homework was completely untouched. Her only hope, Koutarou, had his hands filled with his own homework. Yurika was in a hopeless situation. A year ago she probably would have broken out into tears from being in such a situation. It would be a lot easier to endure the teachers anger for a while then completing her homework. However, she was different now. Though she had tears in her eyes, she wrote down the answers, one after another. If she cheated she might have been able to keep up appearances, but in the end it would just have been for show, she would not have gained anything. Ever since Yurika had decided that she would attend the same university as Koutarou and Harumi, she stopped cheating when it really mattered.

“Uhm... if you beat your pocket a biscuit turns into two, and if you beat at a pace of once every ten seconds, that's six times in one minute. Since the problem says ten minutes, that's a total of 60 times. Which means... uhm, the cookies increase by 60 so... a total of 61? But... that's a lot but I feel like that's too few... ahh, I know I'm getting something wrong, but I don't know what!”

Yurika was currently working on her mathematics homework. Though she was bad with math, she was especially bad with problems written with words. She had no idea of what she needed to calculate. That was the kind of finding and solving of problems that one would require, but Yurika was awfully bad at it.

“Yurika, how about you improve how fast you can think? My indigo magic is good at that kind of thing.”

Seeing Yurika struggle, Maki offered a helping hand. She was her ally this time. Maki was impressed with Yurika's recent efforts so she believed a little bit of cheating would be fine.

“I can't do that. I'm a magical girl of Rainbow Heart after all. I can't use magic for myself.”

It was an attractive proposition but Yurika shook her head. Personal use of magic went against Rainbow Hearts commandments. It wasn't a method Yurika could use.

“Even if you say that, if you flunk everything will be for nothing right?”

“That's true, but... people can't progress if all they do is smooth over their problems. I want to graduate using only my own powers.”

What backed Yurika up more than her commandments as a magician was her promise with Koutarou. She would devote herself to studying and graduate school so she could go to the same university as Koutarou and Harumi. Yurika had for the first time in her life decided to live like a normal girl. For the sake, she wouldn't cheat. If she cheated, she wouldn't learn, and when she would come across something that really mattered, cheating often wouldn't help. Doing things the roundabout way would eventually become a shortcut. The current Yurika was well aware of that.

“Nice spirit, Yurika-chan!”

That was something Shizuka liked hearing, having poured so much time into karate in her childhood. Martial arts wasn't something you learned in a day. Taking the long way was the fastest way to become strong. Rather than focusing on power-type or acrobatic-type moves, repeatedly practicing simple moves would have a

bigger meaning in the future. The talent a master needed was the lack of fear to take the long way. Comparing that to Yurika's way, she was making the correct decision. It was only obvious Shizuka would be happy.

“That said, let me know when you are stuck, okay? I think giving some hints would be okay.”

“Thank you very much!”

With a refreshed expression, Yurika got back to her homework. Seeing that, Maki's eyes were wide open. Yurika was likely a completely different from the person she knew a year ago.

“...That Yurika who only used to run away...”

“Everyone grows up. A lot of things happened over this year after all. Didn't you change too, Aika-san? You're actually worrying about Yurika-chan right now you know.”

“I... you might be right.”

Listening to Shizuka, Maki nodded convinced. It was strange to her that she was gradually understanding love, but she was certain that was helping her grow. As proof, she smiled at Shizuka.

PART 3

With Shizuka's and Maki's support and hints from time to time, Yurika was smoothly working through her homework. However, she had lots of homework. A person can usually maintain a high level of concentration for an hour or so. But the amount she had wasn't something that would be done in an hour. From that point on, her concentration gradually decreased, her mind began running

on a lower gear, and she was now solving problems at half the speed of what she had at the beginning. When that happened, pain accompanied the problems and feelings of wanting to stop and run away began pressing Yurika.

"...I-I can't... my head isn't working anymore..."

Yurika muttered and collapsed on the tea table. It took about three hours until Yurika fell into this state. It was a splendid effort, but she was still only a quarter of the way through her homework. If she continued lying down on the tea table, she would without a doubt never finish her homework. She'd get a scolding from the teacher once school began.

Seeing her like that, Shizuka paused the movie she was watching and went to encourage Yurika.

"Yurika-chan, if you don't do your homework, you'll regret it."

"Even if you say that, my head can't solve the problems anymore. I tried encouraging myself several times, but I can't think anymore."

Yurika understood the reality as well. The longer she did nothing, the more the noose around her neck tightened. But despite Yurika's wishes, her brain was fatigued and wasn't working properly.

"It's not the kind of amount you can do in two days."

Maki who was watching the movie alongside Shizuka dropped her shoulders. No matter how she looked at it, there was more homework to deal with than Yurika was capable of. It was a near impossible challenge without magic.

“Yeah! Maki-chan is right! I'll solve as much as I can and give up on the rest. I'll just have to endure the teacher getting angry!”

Having lost all willpower, Yurika jumped onto Maki's words and raised a white flag. It's not like Yurika had forgotten on purpose, and she had also tried to finish it. This time there was just nothing she could do. Yurika had already begun thinking of how she should apologize to her teacher.

“What do we do now, Aika-san?”

“It would be easy to just let her give up here...”

“But I do want to her to finish her homework, for her own sake as well.”

“Then, should we go call him?”

“Yeah, that's all we can do.”

Shizuka and Maki nodded at each other. The situation was already out of their hands, so the two decided to call for backup. They knew there was only one person who could motivate Yurika now.

PART 4

Shizuka and Maki went out to call for Koutarou. He was at Clan, borrowing her wisdom and technology for his final piece of homework, but upon hearing of Yurika's situation he interrupted his work and returned to room 106.

“Yurika. Wake up.”

“...Satomi-shan... I can't go on... I did my best...”

Yurika showed Koutarou her half-finished homework. Only a quarter of it all was done. Considering Yurika's intelligence and the time spent, she had indeed worked hard.

“Are you going to give up here?”

“...Yes... I'll just have to endure the teacher getting angry at me...”

The exhausted Yurika spoke with tears in her eyes. She didn't like this outcome either, but having reached her limits, she had no other choice.

“I see. So that means you're free now?”

“...Well, yes... but I don't want to move...”

Exhausted and resigned, Yurika was leaning over the tea table in a sleepy state. She had a sorrowful and tired expression, completely opposite from when she had first begun her homework.

“You don't have to move, just go along with me.”

“...What are you doing...?”

“We'll play some professional wrestling. There's a couple of new moves I want to try. You don't have to do anything, just take the hits, I'm sure you're tired after all.”

“Noooooooo!!”

However, the moment Koutarou brought up wrestling Yurika flew straight up and desperately shook her head. Her hair flew around the air.

“Why? You've got free time since you're done with your homework right?”

“I'm not free! I've decided to continue with my homework!”

“I see... then I'm sorry for forcibly inviting you.”

Yurika had been afraid that she'd forcibly be put into various wrestling techniques, but Koutarou obediently withdrew. Seeing her chance, Yurika pressed on further.

“That's right! I have the great goal of finishing my homework!”

Wrestling with Koutarou was something that should be done at the start of a long weekend, not just before the start of a new semester.

“Alright, then call me when you're tired of doing homework.”

“I won't get tired!”

“Knowing you, you'll lose your motivation soon enough.”

“I won't lose my motivation! I'm going to be busy doing homework all of today and tomorrow!”

“But I want to try these new moves out, all day long.”

“I refuse!! If you get it then just go!! You're in the way of my homework!!”

“Okay, okay. But if you get tired of your homework—”

“I said I won't get tired!!”

After putting her all into rejecting Koutarou's offer, Yurika began solving problems again. She looked like a soldier fighting for her life on the battlefield, and she solved problems at the same rate as she had at the start.

PART 5

Even after Koutarou left, Yurika fiercely continued her homework. If she tried to cut any corners Koutarou would come back and use various wrestling moves on her. Yurika continued doing her homework, desperate to avoid that. Being a coward, she was sensitive to danger.

"...Haa~h, Satomi-kun is amazing."

Seeing Yurika restarting her homework, Shizuka let out a sigh. She thought it was impossible to get Yurika to continue her homework. Yet, Koutarou had suddenly appeared, motivated her in mere seconds and left just as quickly. He handled Yurika with unbelievable ease.

"Satomi-kun knows us better than anyone... If that had been any of us working on the homework instead, I'm sure he would be able to motivate us too."

"Yeah, you're right..."

Shizuka nodded at the point Maki was trying to make. A while back when Shizuka had visited her parents' graves, she had been depressed, and Koutarou had been the one to cheer her up. Having experienced that, Shizuka felt like Maki was right.

"...We're being treasured, aren't we... it's like a dream..."

"...Yeah... I feel nothing but gratitude at having been able to meet such a person..."

All the girls of room 106 had experienced similar things to Shizuka. That's why Koutarou would surely have been able to cheer up any of them had they lost heart.

PART 6

Yurika's fear of Koutarou's wrestling move was strong and she desperately continued her homework. There was no other means to protect herself. However, a few hours after restarting on her homework, Yurika was reaching her limit again.

A loud thud echoed through the room.

“Kyaaa!? Y-Yurika!?”

As she was watching a tense scene from the movie, Maki was truly surprised when Yurika collapsed and instinctively let out a cute scream.

“Kyuuuu~”

Yurika had fallen on her backs and her eyes were spinning. Last time she had stopped because of mental fatigue but this time it was completely physical. Yurika had used up all of her energy. She had run out of battery.

“Phuwah...”

Aika-san, what should we do?”

“Hmm... let's call Satomi-kun again.”

“I don't think even he can do anything this time...”

“But we should still show him how much Yurika tried.”

“You're right.”

The two nodded at each other and decided to call for Koutarou again. He was currently onboard Clan's Hazy Moon, so they headed towards the transportation gate on the innermost wall of the room. As they approached, the wall began glowing blue.

“Please take us to Clan-san's place.”

In response to Maki's voice, the gate turned from blue to orange. In order to make it easy to use, the gate was divided by color. Blue was Blue Knight, and orange was Hazy Moon. By the way, the Higashihongan family was purple and the Sakuraba family was white.

“I've started getting used to this mystery transport...”

Shizuka found it mysterious that she was getting used to this strange style of life. Just a little over a year ago she had been a normal high school girl, but now she was living the life of a character from some fictional story.

“You have?”

“You mean you haven't, Aika-san?”

“I'm a magician you know.”

“Ah, right. I completely forgot.”

“Just go on to forget it, please.”

“Ufufu, I'm planning on it.”

Maki and Shizuka wanted the same thing. That's why they would stay the same no matter how much their lifestyle changed or how much power they had, and so, the two ordinary high schools jumped through the gate with smiles on their faces.

PART 7

Yurika's eyes were still spinning when Maki and Shizuka brought Koutarou back to room 106. Koutarou picked her up and gently laid

her down on the tatami mat. As he was doing that, his eyes were very gentle and calm.

“You did good, Yurika...”

Yurika had gone past her mental limit and reached her physical limit. While she hadn't completed her homework, her efforts were worthy of praise. Using all of your power in an effort and not reaching the goal was not the same as breaking your oath. Yurika splendidly upheld her own oath.

“What should we do, Satomi-kun?”

While envious of Yurika who was getting her head patted by Koutarou, Maki asked him about what they should do now. Determining what Yurika should do now was an important problem.

“For starters, let's let her rest a little.”

“At this rate, she'll be scolded by the teacher. She's already at risk of having to redo a year...”

Shizuka anxiously looked at Yurika. She had already been late and missed homework a lot, and before the summer vacation she had received a warning that she might have to redo a year. Not submitting her summer homework was quite the dangerous situation.

“After resting for awhile, I'm sure she'll regain some energy and can continue for a little longer.”

“I hope so...”

Shizuka believed it would be difficult for Yurika to do any more of her homework. She couldn't imagine that there was any more Yurika could continue after exhausting all her strength.

“It's okay, landlord-san. Yurika's the kind of girl that will pull through when she has too.”

However, Koutarou firmly believed in Yurika, and it showed in his eyes.

PART 8

Yurika woke up as the smell of her favorite food tickled her nose. She would surely not have been able to wake up for any other reason.

“I smell ramen!”

What woke Yurika up was the smell of instant noodles. The smell of the artificial seasoning stimulated her appetite and blew away her drowsiness. As a result, a few seconds after smelling the food, she was completely awake.

“Thank you for the foo~d!”

Yurika picked up the instant noodles off of the tea table and skillfully split the chopsticks with just her right hand.

“Wait a minute!”

However, before she could start chowing down, she was stopped by Koutarou. As he did, she looked up at him with a dissatisfied expression.

“Why are you bullying me?”

All of the instant noodles in room 106 exists just for her. To Yurika, having someone interrupt her meal was the worst she could imagine.

“You can eat, but promise me one thing first.”

“I promise. Thank you for the food!”

Not even listening to what Koutarou has to say, she made a promise and began eating the noodles. The reason for that was because of her appetite for the noodles in front of her and because she trusted that Koutarou would only make promises for important things.

“Don't forget you promised.”

“Yes.”

“Once you're done eating, make sure you continue on your homework.”

“...Eh?”

Yurika froze on the spot.

“T-That's impossible! I can't continue!!”

Yurika completely forgot about eating and shook her head. As she did, the noodles still hanging down from her mouth were swung around splashing soup on her surroundings.

“But you promised. And you've already started eating.”

“Ugh!?”

Yurika was at a loss for words. Having thoughtlessly made a promise completely backfired.

At this rate she would be going back to hell. Having realized that, Yurika quickly slurped down her noodles and appealed to Koutarou.

“I-I can't go on! I'm not making up excuses, it's really impossible!!”

She couldn't finish, even if she fully exhausted herself. She didn't have enough willpower or stamina left in her to face down her remaining homework. She was desperately trying to get Koutarou to understand, she was sad that it ended this way too.

There, Koutarou reached out with his hands and placed them on Yurika's cheeks.

“Yurika, face this way.”

Koutarou gently turned Yurika's face towards his own. As he did, she slowly glanced upwards towards him.

“Yurika, you certainly worked hard. You worked until you reached your limit. Well done, Yurika.”

“Eh...?”

She never expected that she would get praise, so Yurika's eyes opened wide. Ignoring that, Koutarou continued speaking.

“But knowing that, I still ask you.”

With a short introductory remark, Koutarou posed his actual question.

“...Yurika, is it really impossible to go on?”

“Satomi-san...”

The Yurika that Koutarou knew was a really irresponsible girl. She always tried to slack off and dodge the subject. She was someone whose future you'd worry about.

“You're the kind of girl that can go one step further after you think it's impossible. I know you can.”

However, on the other hand, Yurika would never give up when it really mattered. Like when Sanae was still a ghost and started disappearing or when she threw herself in the way to save Harumi. There were plenty of examples. That's why Koutarou expected Yurika to show that kind of spirit here too.

“So Yurika, why not try a little more? You only have to go for as long as you can. If you really can't continue you can stop. How about it?”

“I...”

Koutarou stared directly into Yurika's eyes. As he did, she felt like he was staring in the depths of her mind. His eyes were telling her that she should be able to do even more.

This is because Satomi-san has high expectations for me, isn’t it...

Yurika knew of Koutarou's faults. Yet that Koutarou was expecting Yurika to try her best. Looking at the bigger picture, one could say that he was expectant of their future together. The moment she realized that, Yurika made up her mind.

“I understand. I will try a little more.”

Yurika said and nodded. Since Koutarou had taken a step forward, she couldn't reject him. She didn't mind how irresponsible she was in regards to herself, but she couldn't give up when others got involved. Yurika had matured to the point that the title of magical girl was suitable for her.

Shizuka and Maki silently watched over Koutarou and Yurika. They were sure that not even Koutarou could do anything this time, but going against their expectation, he had successfully convinced Yurika.

“What a surprise. Satomi-kun really does understand Yurika-chan...”

“That looked more like Yurika was being considerate of Satomi-kun's feelings to me.”

“I think it's both. Satomi-kun asked Yurika, and she responded. Those two don't have a one-sided relationship...”

“I'm a little jealous though.”

“Yeah, it's like they're using the homework to get along better.”

Shizuka and Maki smiled. Koutarou's and Yurika's bond further deepened through this matter. The two weren't sure if they were doing homework or just playing.

“That's right, Aika-san.”

“Yes?”

“Let's try if we can get Satomi-kun to do the same to us next time.”

Having come up with a plan, Shizuka grinned as she glanced at Koutarou from the corner of her eye. He was unaware of Shizuka's intentions and was currently helping Yurika solve a problem.

“I don't think there's a reason to try... ah, but, there might be differences on the surface.”

Maki was convinced that Koutarou would do the same for them. That's why she felt bad for putting Koutarou to the test.

“It's those differences that you enjoy.”

“You can be surprisingly mean, Kasagi-san.”

“We want to enjoy our youth too, right?”

“...Yes, I think so too.”

The two girls cheerfully chatted away as they watched Yurika working on her homework again and Koutarou helping her. Koutarou's and Yurika's bond wasn't the only one to deepen through this matter. The same was true for Maki and Shizuka as well.

PART 9

Yurika solved her final problem 36 hours after she had begun, at the evening of August 31.

“...I-It's done... I'm done...”

Yurika dropped the pen in her hand and it rolled away.

“Good work, Yurika-chan.”

As if waiting for that moment, Shizuka put down a glass of barley tea in front of Yurika. Having sent glances from time to time, Shizuka had a rough understanding of the progress Yurika was making. The same was true for Maki and she smiled as she peeked at the homework.

“There's a lot of mistakes, but you've finished everything. I'm impressed you could be so obstinate, Yurika.”

“T-Thank you very much, Shizuka-san, Maki-chan.”

Yurika drank her barley tea with tears of relief streaming down her cheeks. This was the first time barley tea had ever tasted this good.

All of the hardships are now over... I better have Satomi-san praise me later♪

Yurika felt a sense of accomplishment as she sipped on her tea, but here Shizuka said something completely unexpected to her.

“Now all that's left is the integrated studies report. Good job, Yurika-chan. Ah, or do you already have something ready for that?”

“Eh!? Integrated study?”

Those were words that didn't exist in Yurika's head. She was convinced that the problem sheets she had gotten was all of the homework, so this hidden homework suddenly appearing meant trouble.

“W-What kind of homework is that!?”

“You forgot, huh, or maybe you were asleep? Either way, during the last integrated studies class we were told to write a report on a topic of our choosing. Most people seem to be writing about the occupational training we had before summer vacation though.”

This homework consequently become homework over the summer.

Just before the summer vacation of the second year in Kitsushouharukaze high school occupational training was held. This was a variant of a school excursion and students got to experience joining a company for a short period of time to learn the mindset for working. They were then asked to submit what they had experienced as a report, but this year the occupational training had cut really close to the summer vacation, so the report would be submitted at the start of the new semester.

Therefore, Yurika would have to write a report to submit as well. Yurika still hadn't finished all of her homework.

“...T-The occupational training... what did I do again... uhm...”

Yurika desperately tried to recall what she had been doing a month and a half ago. However, she wasn't certain of her memories. Completely oblivious to the fact that she had to submit a report, Yurika simply worked without a thought, and she hadn't bothered to commit anything to memory. That's why even if she tried to remember it, it was now buried beneath her memories from the summer vacation. She had completely forgotten.

“I can't remember! Shizuka-san, Maki-chan, help me!”

With her own memory being unreliable, all she could do was rely on others. So to begin with, Yurika implored the nearby Shizuka and Maki.

“We'd love too, but...”

“We were in a different group from yours. That's why we don't know what you did.”

“No way!!”

But unfortunately Shizuka and Maki had been at a different company and were unable to help Yurika.

“Aaahhh, what should I do!?”

Yurika held her head in pain. She felt like everything was over.

“Calm down, Yurika. Start by remembering people who trained with you.”

“The people with me... that's right I was with Satomi-san!!”

“So you should ask Satomi-kun what you were doing and write that on your report.”

“I'm going to Satomi-san right away! Maki-chan, where's Satomi-san now!?”

Koutarou was nowhere to be found in room 106. But Maki who was a self-proclaimed vassal of Koutarou's should know where he is.

“He should be at Clan-san's place today as well.”

“Okay!”

Having gotten information from Maki, Yurika hurried towards Koutarou. Right now, he was her only hope.

PART 10

After jumping through the gate in the inner room, Yurika was already in the passage of the Hazy Moon. As Yurika stepped on the floor a dry sound echoed through the passage. Unlike the cramped room 106, the white and beautiful passage seemingly continued on forever.

“Clan-san's room is... ah! That should be it!”

Clan's room were a few meters from where Yurika had landed. In front of Clan's room hanged a wooden plate to make it easy to find even for a first time visitor.

'Princess Clariossa's Room☆' was written on the plate. Koutarou and Sanae had made that plate and its design differed quite a bit from Clan's personality. Koutarou and Sanae had hoped that its cheerful design would rub off, but sadly it still hadn't.

“Clan-san, Clan-san! Please give me Satomi-san!”

Yurika burst into Clan's room at full speed, and had the door not been automatic she might have broken right through it.

“That's unusual, you hardly ever come here, Yu— kyaaaaa!?”

“Clan-san, please give me Satomi-san! Please!!”

Ever since she passed through the gate, Clan knew that Yurika was coming. However, her momentum and pressure came as a shock and Clan almost jumped backwards.

“W-What's the matter!?”

“It would take too long to explain, but I can't finish my homework without Satomi-san! So please give me Satomi-san!”

Yurika gave Clan a brief explanation and put her hands in front of Clan, as if telling her to put Koutarou in them.

“I see, so that's what it is. I don't mind, it's not like I have any business with Bertorion.”

Clan obediently accepted Yurika's demand. Koutarou had only come here to borrow her help, Clan herself had no business with him in particular. That's why she had no objections if he was taken away.

“Thank you very much! So, where is Satomi-san!?”

“Bertorion is over there.”

“Satomi-san!”

Yurika ran in the direction Clan pointed her to. In that direction was a sofa and a desk, and Yurika could see Koutarou's back as he sat on the sofa. Koutarou had been working on his own homework there yesterday and today.

“Satomi-san, please help! Please tell me what we did during the occupational training!”

Yurika ran around the sofa and desperately pleaded with Koutarou.

“Satomi-san! Ah...”

But as she saw his face she lost all of her momentum. Instead despair filled her expression. The moment she saw his face, she had realized that all hope was lost.

“...It's over... my homework... this is just too cruel...”

Koutarou was leaning back on the sofa and sleeping. He was deep in sleep, and he didn't budge a muscle as Yurika called out to him. Yurika knew from experience that he wouldn't wake up for a while. In other words, he couldn't help her.

“...Haahh... and I tried so hard... to trip up at the finish line... this is just...”

Yurika lost all strength from her hopelessness. Just as she was about to complete her homework, her last hope was crushed. Because she had tried so hard these two days, the disappointment was even worse.

“Oh, I thought he was being quiet, so he's sleeping. But I guess it can't be helped. He's been working on that report since yesterday after all... what's the matter, Yurika-san?”

“...It's nothing... I was just thinking that Satomi-san looks so happy as he sleeps...”

Tears flooded out of Yurika's eyes, that was all she could do.

“I don't really get it, but... Yurika-san, have this.”

“What's this?”

Yurika received something from Clan. She couldn't see clearly because of her tears, but judging from her sense of touch it was most likely some papers.

“Bertorion told me to give this to you... it seems like he knew this would happen.”

“Satomi-san did...?”

Yurika wiped away her tears and looked at the papers again. On it, the following was written:

'Occupational training report, insect caretakers at a pet shop, a collaboration between Satomi Koutarou and Nijino Yurika'

That was the occupational training report that Koutarou had written. Normally he would only have to write his own report, but upon seeing the progress Yurika was making on her homework, he decided to write a collaborative report. Since the description of Yurika's participation also had to be taken into account, he had spent all this time writing it. This had been the reason as to why Koutarou had been absent from room 106.

“Satomi-san... you really are..”

The tears she was supposed to have wiped away began overflowing again. A deep sense of relief and gratitude filled her chest. Koutarou had believed that Yurika would complete her homework and worked on this report. Without any basis to go on, he had simply believed in her. The joy Yurika felt from completing her homework didn't compare to the joy she felt now.

“...There's so much I want to say, but... I'm almost at my limit too... so I'll just say this one thing...”

Yurika muttered and collapsed down on the sofa as well. She had fallen down right next to Koutarou and she leaned on him. In that position, Yurika whispered into his ear.

"...Satomi-san, just like I promised, I'm done with my homework..."

After Yurika whispered that, she quietly shut her eyes. She was already past her limits. Being even more exhausted than Koutarou she fell asleep mere seconds after closing her eyes.

"I don't like being treated like some side character after spending two days helping, free of charge, but—"

Clan pulled a blanket over the two and left the room after turning off most lights.

"—out of respect for your hard work, I'll let you have Bertorion for today, Yurika-san. Fufufu."

The door closed behind Clan and silence returned to the room. Only two sounds could be heard in the room. They were the breaths of Koutarou and Yurika. Clan had no intentions of returning to this room for a while, so this would continue for the time being. While that supposed to be a great thing for Yurika, she herself was completely unaware.

Welcome, Father!

PART 1

Saturday, September 4

It was Saturday, September 4 just after the summer vacation had ended. Due to work related matters, Koutarou's father, Yuuichirou, would be returning to Kitsushouharukaze city for a little while. While his original had just been to finish work and head back, for various reasons, a hole in his schedule opened up this evening. So Yuuichirou decided to pay his son an unannounced visit. Since it was so sudden his son might be surprised but it had been a while since they met so Yuuichirou wanted to make full use of this coincidence.

“It should be just up ahead.”

Yuuichirou headed towards Corona House, following the map in his memories. Fortunately it was accurate and he reached his destination without getting lost.

“Here it is, Corona House. There's no doubt.”

Corona House was supposedly built over 25 years ago, but you couldn't tell from how it looked. The design was old-fashioned but the building itself was well maintained. Since it was such an old building it was clear that the landlord or caretaker put a lot of care into maintenance.

“I hope Koutarou is doing alright...”

When he visited him last year, Koutarou's room was clean and the contents of his fridge was neatly arranged. He clearly remembered

being surprised as when they lived together, things hadn't been that clean.

But it had been a year since then. If the room had been clean because it had just been moved into then he should be able to catch a glimpse of how Koutarou normally lived now. That's why Yuuichirou hadn't let Koutarou know he was coming.

“Koutarou's room was 106...”

Yuuichirou entered the Corona House grounds and headed towards room 106. He was looking forward to seeing how his son was living but he was still uneasy. Having raised Koutarou on his own, he felt he owed Koutarou a lot for making him feel so lonely. He felt uneasy, worrying whether or not Koutarou had returned to his past rough lifestyle. He hadn't contacted Koutarou because he wanted to find out, his sense of responsibility told him so.

“This is it.”

Yuuichirou stood in front of room 106. Without any hesitation he pressed the intercom button and a chime rang out.

“Ye~s.”

However, here something unexpected happened. The reply from the room belonged to a woman, and a rather young one at that. It was the voice of a woman in her teens or twenties.

Why is it a woman’s voice? Did Koutarou get a girlfriend?

The first thing Yuuichirou imagined was the relationship the woman had to Koutarou. When he had been young he had a girlfriend himself. That's why it wouldn't be strange for Koutarou to

have one as well. If anything, since Koutarou had a tendency to keep others away, it would be something welcome.

“Who is it?”

However, the moment he saw the face of the girl who opened the door, Yuuichirou gave up on the girlfriend theory. The girl had long golden hair and beautiful blue eyes. She was obviously a foreigner. She was also short and her face was overflowing with youth. She looked several years younger than Koutarou. Yuuichirou couldn't imagine that Koutarou had a girlfriend younger than him and from a foreign country.

“What is it?”

“It's a guest. He's wearing a suit in this hot weather so he must be a door to door salesman or something.”

“Your highness, that manner of speaking is rude to our guest.”

The next two girls that appeared further refuted the theory of Koutarou having a foreigner as a girlfriend. The first was a foreigner girl with classic glasses. The second girl had a short cut and a serious impression but as expected, a foreigner.

As he saw the three girls Yuuichirou suspected that he had accidentally rung on the wrong door.

“I'm sorry, it seems I got the wrong room.”

“I see. Well that kind of things happen when it's this hot.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Don't worry about it. Good bye.”

The golden haired girl on the left showed an elegant smile and closed the door. The smile had a strangely attractive charm to it. Because of it, Yuuichirou remained standing in place for a moment after the door was closed.

“Oh right, Koutarou.”

Having returned to himself, Yuuichirou checked the room number again. Since this mistake had come from him not confirming the room number he made sure to check properly this time.

“Oh?”

However, the name on room 106 said Satomi on it. Just to be certain Yuuichirou pulled out his pocketbook and confirmed the address. Corona House, room 106, it was correct. This room should without a doubt be Koutarou's apartment.

“...So those girls must've been Koutarou's friends or something...”

Yuuichirou might have held a preconception that Koutarou would have no relationships with any foreigners. His school might have had an overseas exchange program.

“Alright.”

Recollecting himself, Yuuichirou reached out to the door's intercom again. Since this was the second time, there was some slight hesitation before he pushed the button, but once again the chime rang.

“Ye~s.”

Just like before a woman's voice replied, and at the same timing as before, the front door's knob turned. Yuuichirou was sure it was the same girl as before as he waited for the door to open.

“Who are you, uncle?”

“Huh?”

However, Yuuichirou's expectations proved wrong again. The face that appeared on the other side of the door belonged to a small girl with a rice cracker in her mouth. She moved her big eyes up and down and looked at Yuuichirou with confusion.

“A guest again?”

“Since he's this persistent he must have a lot of pressure to sell.”

From behind the first girl, two more girls Yuuichirou hadn't seen before appeared. One had a ponytail and an apron, and gave of an active and homely impression, the other girl had twin tails and seemed to be lacking confidence. All three of them were different from the first three.

“So, what business do you have?”

The girl with the rice cracker moved it out of her mouth to her hand and tilted her head. As she did, Yuuichirou remembered what he came here for and explained his reasons to the girl.

“Ah, uhm... actually I have business with the resident of this room.”

“With Koutarou?”

The moment the girl mentioned his son's name, Yuuichirou knew he wasn't at the wrong room. However, he still had his doubts. Judging from the girls' appearances, they were Koutarou's friends, but he had no reason why the three foreigners and the three girls in front of him, for a total six, were gathering in Koutarou's room.

“Yes, actually—”

Just as Yuuichirou was about to confirm his doubts, the cellphone in his pocket made a noisy sound.

“Who is it calling now... oh!?”

Yuuichirou interrupted his conversation with the girl and took a look at his cellphone screen. On it, the name of the business partner he would be meeting with later was being displayed.

“Miss, I'm very sorry. This is an important call so I'll have to take my leave for now. I will be back later.”

“Ah, yeah, okay.”

Yuuichirou pressed the phone's call button and closed the door to room 106. He wasn't here on vacation, and he still had work to do.

PART 2

The call was indeed an urgent one. His business partner wanted to delay the meeting from 7PM to 8PM and needed an answer right away. Yuuichirou acknowledged the request and hung up. Since that was the only reason for the call, the conversation didn't even last for five minutes.

“...Ugh, those girls must think I'm just some strange old man...”

Yuuichirou smiled wryly as he returned the cellphone to his pocket. He then pressed the intercom button for a third time.

“Ye~s.”

The voice this time was high-pitched and carried far. It wasn't the voice of one of the two girls he had talked with before, but since there were six girls in the room, Yuuichirou figured it must have belonged to one of the other four and didn't think much of it.

“Who might you be?”

However, once more, Yuuichirou was betrayed by his expectations. The girl that opened the door was someone he hadn't seen before. She had long black hair and a thin figure. Her very existence seemingly exudes gentleness and it was clear that she had a good upbringing.

What is up with this room... Koutarou, just what kind of life are you living?

As Yuuichirou was stunned by the appearance of a seventh girl, yet another one appeared behind her.

“Harumi, what is it?”

Behind the first girl was another girl with black hair. She wore something similar to Japanese-styled clothing and had a calm expression and mannerisms. In her hand she was holding a frying pan, she was most likely in the middle of cooking. This girl also gave off the impression of having a good upbringing, though in a different sense of the word.

“Kiriha-san... it seems like the person who came before is back again.”

“I see, let me take over.”

The girl in Japanese clothing put down the frying pan and traded places with the first girl. Confident and calm eyes stared at Yuuichirou. When it came to mental age, she was probably the oldest of all the girls he'd seen.

“What business do you have with us?”

The girl's brisk words struck Yuuichirou, but thanks to that Yuuichirou returned to himself and explained to the girl why he was here.

“Satomi Koutarou is supposed to live here... and I would like to speak with him.”

“With Koutarou...? I see, if I'm not mistaken you're Koutarou's...”

The girl seemed to have realized something after speaking with Yuuichirou and nodded. She turned back towards the room and called out into the inner room.

“Maki.”

“Yes?”

As she did, another girl poked her face out. This too was a completely new girl, making it a total of nine girls. This new girl had soft-looking hair reaching all the way to her shoulders and had eyes giving off the impression of someone with an adamant will, yet at the same time she looked somewhat fragile, giving her a mysterious feel.

“Where is Koutarou right now?”

“Satomi-kun went out to work this morning. So he should be coming home soon.”

“I see, thank you.”

“You're welcome.”

After saying what she had to say, the ninth girl returned to the inner room. The black haired girl turned back to Yuuichirou and let him know of Koutarou's whereabouts.

“Koutarou has left for his part-time job. He works at the excavation site on the top of the hill where the Kitsushouharukaze high school is located on.”

“I've heard about it from Koutarou.”

Yuuichirou also knew about Koutarou's part-time job. Since Koutarou was still a student, he needed his parents consent to get a part-time job.

“And we are—”

Eventually the girl began telling Yuuichirou what he wanted to know the most. Right now he was more interested in learning about them than Koutarou.

“—people who have become Koutarou's friends during this past year. We now get along so well that we can come and go to each others houses.”

The girl clearly asserted herself and politely bowed. The other black haired girl who had opened the door also bowed to him. They were very amiable greetings.

“How polite. I am Satomi Yuuichirou, Koutarou's father.”

Yuuichirou responded by bowing as well. That seriousness was something the girls had seen before and the girls naturally felt familiar with Yuuichirou.

“I have heard rumors about you. It is nice to meet you, father. I am Kurano Kiriha.”

“I am Sakuraba Harumi. Me and Satomi-kun are getting along well.”

Like that, Yuuichirou met with the nine girls. It was far more quiet when compared to Koutarou's meetings with them, yet the girls

were more nervous than they had been during their meeting with Koutarou. If they were disliked by Yuuichirou it would be a big minus in their future.

PART 3

Koutarou didn't know that his father had come visit his room until after he had finished his part-time job for the day. Excavation work got him dirty and sweaty, and in order to keep his cellphone from breaking he left it behind in the locker as he changed into his work wear.

“Not good, if everyone runs into my old man...!”

Having changed from his work wear to his normal clothes, Koutarou sent out a mass mail to all the girls telling them to keep away from room 106 until night and he hurried on home. Even if the girls didn't run into him, their stuff was still lying around the room. He would need to clean that up before Yuuichirou showed up.

“Hey, Koutarou!”

“Old man!?”

However, sadly by the time Koutarou returned to Corona House, Yuuichirou was already there. The only fortunate thing was that Yuuichirou was outside the room, smoking by himself.

“You got back quicker than I thought.”

Yuuichirou smiled as he looked at his son's face before pushing his cigarette into a portable ashtray. He had begun smoking after losing

his wife but he never smoke in front of Koutarou to set a better example.

“Alright. Let's go, Koutarou.”

“Go? Where?”

“Since we've met for the first time in so long, I thought we should go visit mom together.”

Yuuichirou picked up the bouquet nearby. He had prepared them for especially to visit his wife's grave.

Koutarou quickly agreed. Nothing bad could come from getting away from his room, and it had been awhile since the two of them visited his mother's grave together.

PART 4

Koutarou's mother, Takami, parted with this world about eleven years ago. Takami was a fine woman and those related to the Satomi family equally grieved her death. Her ashes were placed in the Satomi family grave. Only a few years had passed since she married into the family, but nobody opposed doing so.

“Long time no see, mom. Both Koutarou and I are doing fine.”

“I'm fine, but the old man is iffy. I always ended up doing the housework.”

“Don't be silly. I can do it when I have to.”

“Well, I'm sure mom knows more about that than me.”

They put down the flowers and spoke towards the tombstone. If Koutarou used the spiritual powers he had gotten from Sanae he could easily confirm if his mother's spirit was there or not. However, he never did. To humans, the truth wasn't always necessarily important. There was meaning in speaking towards the tombstone as if she was. At least that's what Koutarou believed.

“Geez, you take after your mother.”

“What parts?”

“The inflexible part.”

“And you couldn't leave that alone.”

“Well. That would be the case... stop making me say embarrassing stuff.”

“Sorry, sorry. But there you have it mom. You don't have to worry about us.”

“We're doing fine. So Takami, watch over us from heaven.”

Koutarou and Yuuichirou continued speaking to tombstone for a while longer, where the mother of the family who was supposed to be as if they were trying to recreate the family life that was lost eleven years ago. At this time, Koutarou had a lonely expression he very rarely showed. Since his mother's death had greatly influenced his personality, he couldn't remain himself in this place.

PART 5

With their grave visit over, Koutarou and Yuuichirou were headed towards the station. Yuuichirou had had a business meeting after

this which he needed to head to. His fatherly face wouldn't remain for much longer, by the time the sun set it would be the face of working man.

“...I've caused a lot of troubles for you after mom died.”

“I'm old enough now to know that you get upset from losing a loved one. So I don't mind anymore.”

“I see... you're at an age where it wouldn't be strange to have a girlfriend after all.”

“It's not going that well though.”

Koutarou and Yuuichirou were talking on the way to the station. The topic shifted from Koutarou's mother to Koutarou himself. It was only obvious for a father living far away to be interested in his son. The setting sun's light fell on them as they walked side by side.

“But you still have some girl you get along with, right?”

“Well, a few.”

“Nine are quite enough. Isn't there someone you're interested in among them?”

“Eh!?”

Koutarou was at a loss for words. The words Yuuichirou had casually spoken caught him off guard. With the mention of nine, Koutarou instinctively thought off the girls of room 106. Yuuichirou had met with the girls.

“Did you meet them, old man?”

Koutarou carefully chose his words and asked Yuuichirou. The nine girls had special origins so there was a chance Yuuichirou had gotten a bad impression of them. It was also possible that Yuuichirou wouldn't be so pleased to find nine girls in Koutarou's room. This was an extremely tense situation for Koutarou.

“Hm? Yeah. A moment before you got back home. They're all good girls.”

However, despite Koutarou's worries, Yuuichirou smiled. Considering his expression, it was clear that Yuuichirou hadn't gotten a bad impression of the girls.

“Since there were so many I didn't get all the details but... it seems like you helped them out in their time of need.”

“Ah, yeah. Something like that.”

Koutarou got a rough understanding of what had happened when Yuuichirou met the girls. The girls avoided explaining hard to understand subjects and only told him the essential parts.It was a suitable explanation for Yuuichirou who lived in the ordinary world.

“Since then we've gotten closer.”

“If I'm going to be honest, Koutarou. With the exception of Kenji-kun, I didn't think you'd find people like that. So I was surprised.”

Yuuichirou said and smiled wryly.

“Old man...”

Despite the girl omitting details, Yuuichirou had gotten a proper understanding of their relationship with Koutarou.

“I've finally understood why you are doing fine on your own, Koutarou. It's thanks to those girls.”

The girls' existence was very welcome for Yuuichirou. Since he felt indebted to Koutarou, the girls' existence were a blessing for Yuuichirou. Even more so since they were so pleasant. He felt even more reassured since only Kenji had been that close to Koutarou before.

“I've only recently realized that myself.”

“That's good. Don't forget to be thankful for those girls.”

“I intend to.”

“If you say that then we're good.”

Yuuichirou smiled happily and nodded. Seeing that, Koutarou realized that the meeting between his dad and the girls went far better than he imagined. Of course, Koutarou intended to treasure the girls. He had no intention or betraying Yuuichirou or the girls.

“By the way, Koutarou. Who's your favorite among them?”

“Eh? What now, all of a sudden.”

Koutarou's eyes shot wide open in surprise. Yuuichirou had asked something completely unexpected.

“They're that varied. I'm sure at least one of them appeals to you.”

“Well, it's not like there aren't any. But I'm still not sure.”

Koutarou couldn't answer Yuuichirou's question. Right now, Koutarou couldn't find any differences between the girls.

“Is that so.”

“What made you decide to marry mom?”

But if Koutarou learned why Yuuichirou chose Takami, he might be able to spot those differences the girls had. He wanted to partake in his father's experience.

“Why I chose her, huh... we actually got along poorly at first.”

“It didn't look like that to me.”

The parents Koutarou knew were always intimate. That's why being told that they hadn't got along was something Koutarou couldn't imagine.

“Well of course. We got married because we solved our poor relationship.”

“I see, of course. Then why was it resolved?”

“I'll omit the details because it's embarrassing, but the main reason was... that's right, the main reason was that we gradually grew to understand each other as time passed.”

“I see...”

“The direct opportunity was that we got involved in the same problem and as we were working on resolving it just sort of happened. But this was just an opportunity and not the reason.”

“I think I get it.”

Yuuichirou's story was something Koutarou felt familiar with. His relationship with the girls had been built up on similar grounds. The opportunities often came from trouble, but it wasn't the actual reason. The only reason was that they understood each other.

“That's why it felt right for me and Takami. Koutarou, don't you have someone like that?”

Yuuichirou smiled as he asked Koutarou. It was a smile consisting of interest as a parent and interest as a man. A special expression that manifested itself as Koutarou was becoming adult.

“I really don't get it. I can't see a clear difference. They're all good girls in their own ways.”

In the end, Koutarou couldn't find one girl that stood out from the others. But that wasn't because none of them felt right. If anything it was the opposite.

Just who do I love...? What should I do from now on...?

He felt like he understood all of the girls and they all understood him. He also knew their worries and weaknesses. He didn't want to leave them be and he didn't want to be left alone either. As they overcame hardships together, the feeling that this girl might be the right one bloomed within him. However that wasn't limited to just one girl. By the time he realized there were already nine girls that met that condition.

“Think it over carefully. Nothing good will come from rushing a decision. It's a decision that will affect both of your lives after all.”

“Old man...”

“And because they're all good girls, I won't forgive you if you make a half-assed decision.”

“Haha, that's just like you old man.”

Koutarou smiled as well. He knew that he couldn't casually make a choice. If everyone felt right it meant that everyone was precious. He couldn't do something half-assed and hurt the girls. If he didn't know than he needed to spend even more time and face that problem.

“By the way, how does things look on your end?”

Having reached a conclusion for now, Koutarou shifted the question back to Yuuichirou. Since this was a good chance, there was something he wanted to know.

“You've found a nice person, right?”

“Koutarou...”

Based on Yuuichirou's behavior and speech, Koutarou sensed the presence of a woman in his life. However Yuuichirou hadn't told Koutarou himself. That's why now was his chance to ask.

“I'm fine now. I've grown up, and I have Mackenzie and everyone else. You can be free, old man.”

Koutarou knew why Yuuichirou hadn't done anything. The love for his wife hadn't gone away, and he also held back out of consideration for Koutarou, and now he felt that Yuuichirou was being tied down by that, which wasn't good.

“I've decided to continue like this until you've become an independent adult. There's nothing for you to worry about.”

“So there really is one.”

“Yeah.”

“But I feel bad for that person. You're keeping her waiting right?”

Koutarou had first felt the presence of a woman in Yuuichirou's life when he noticed that his taste in clothes changed. Since Koutarou was in charge of housework when they lived together, he noticed one day as he was washing the clothes. That was back when Koutarou was in middle school and several years had already passed since then.

“She understands. I've told her everything.”

When Yuuichirou spoke those words, he looked back for an instant.

“I see...”

Seeing Yuuichirou's behavior, Koutarou was convinced. Seeing that, Koutarou became convinced that the real reason why their relationship hadn't grown was because Yuuichirou still loved his wife.

Yeah, it’s really not something you need to rush...

Koutarou thought to the half-knitted sweater deep in his wardrobe. That was something his mother had been working on when she got into the accident. Completing that would be one step for both Koutarou and Yuuichirou move on. It had also been the reason for Koutarou joining the knitting society.

“In exchange.”

“Hm?”

“You better make the wedding a big one. You've kept her waiting for years right?”

“Koutarou... yeah, by all means, let's do that.”

The two then continued walking towards the station while talking about insignificant things before parting ways. While their parting was curt, there was no doubt that today was very meaningful for both of them.

PART 6

When Koutarou returned to the room, all of the girls were for some reason sitting straight.

“I'm back, what are you doing?”

Koutarou had no idea why the girls were doing that. Then as if to response to Koutarou, all of the girls lowered their heads. They were more or less prostrating.

“H-Hey?”

““We're sorry!!””

“Like I said, what are you doing?”

The girls were apologizing, but Koutarou didn't know of any reason as to why they had to apologize. Koutarou's confusion grew ever bigger.

“There is actually something we must apologize to you for.”

As Koutarou was starting to feel troubled, Kiriha began explaining the situation. Behind her, the remaining eight nodded their heads in unison. It seemed like Kiriha was speaking for all of them.

“We nine have met with your father. Mr. Yuuichirou actually arrived here before he contacted you. That's why we suspect that we have caused you some troubles and are therefore apologizing like this.”

“”We're sorry!””

The girls lowered their heads again. That was when Koutarou finally understood the situation. They were apologizing for having met with his father.

“We'll be careful not to let others see us in the future.”

“...What, is that all... I thought this would be about something worse...”

Koutarou let out a small sigh and sat down facing the girls. He had been a little worried because the girls all looked so serious.

“Satomi-kun, you're not, mad...?”

Maki who was sitting closest to Koutarou timidly asked him. Since she didn't want him to hate her, she was very invested in knowing how he felt. In response, Koutarou carefreely shook his head.

“I'm not really angry. I couldn't contact you until later. Besides, the old man was in a great mood, saying how you're all such good girls. So there's no reason for me to be angry.”

It was Koutarou's fault for not being able to contact the girls earlier as he didn't have his cellphone with him during work, and Yuuichirou seemed to like them. Koutarou had no reason to scold any of them.

“I see... thank god...”

Maki let out a sigh of relief. The other eight girls did the same in varying degrees, and it wasn't until now that they were able to smile again. However, the atmosphere was still somewhat strange, and Koutarou continued speaking trying to fix that.

“By the way, what did you talk to my old man about?”

“Well, we went through everything from the beginning. We just omitted what we couldn't say.”

Sanae responded to Koutarou's intentions. She didn't like the stiff feel in the air.

“Like how when we first met Koutarou we only fought and such.”

“Or the sports festival or when we went to beach, we also talked about the culture festival.”

“I was the one to tell him about the play.”

“Yuuichirou-sama wanted the pictures of you when you on the stage so I presented him with some.”

The girls joined in one after another and reported what they spoke with Yuuichirou about. As he listened to that he began thinking.

Yeah, a lot has happened between us...

Even if incidents and fights were omitted, there were a lot of memories between Koutarou and the girls. So they had told Yuuichirou a huge amount of stories. Yuuichirou must have been surprised. As he listened to the girls, Koutarou smiled inside.

“I told him about the time I was stranded on the snowy mountains and how you saved me.”

“I was so surprised when you started telling that story Aika-san. That story was just barely safe to tell. Ah, I told him about me being a landlord.”

“I told him about how you would go hunt insects from to time. It seems like you've always been like that, Bertorion.”

“I told him about how we rode on a roller coaster together and such.”

“And I told him about our activities in the knitting society.”

Another thought crossed Koutarou's mind as he listened to the girls.

Someone who feels right, huh...

That was that the girls were indeed special to Koutarou. If he were to borrow Yuuichirou's words, they felt right.

“What's the matter, Koutarou?”

“It's nothing. I was just thinking that so much has happened this year and a half.”

“Yeah... but there will much more from now on.”

“Yeah, you're right, Sanae.”

“Ehehehe~”

Koutarou and the girls had a lot of memories together. However, that wasn't all. They would surely make more memories from now on. That was a certain as the stars twinkling in the night sky. Koutarou firmly believed so.

PART 7

To Dark Crimson, her previous loss was extremely humiliating. Despite her combination attacks with Dark Green's future forecast, they had still been overcome by the brains of a single person who couldn't even use magic. As a result, Dark Navy was captured, and was in enemy hands even now. Darkness Rainbow had no sense of camaraderie, and only used each other instead. But Dark Crimson liked Dark Navy, Maki. She could empathize with Navy's natural born seriousness. That's why Dark Crimson wanted to clear herself of her humiliation and reclaim Maki. But even if she challenged them, the outcome would just be the same. Some improvements were necessary.

The reason for why they had lost was more than obvious. Despite being magicians that identified themselves as evangelists of knowledge, they hadn't lost to magic, but to knowledge itself. That's why Dark Crimson sought for scientific knowledge. However,

normal science wouldn't be enough. At best she would just become equal to her foes. Thus, she made a deal with Maya and obtained alien scientific knowledge.

"...Ray of Sunshine – Modifier – Single Wavelength."

Crimson's incantation echoed throughout the training area.

As she finished her incantation, a red light extended from her cane. When that light reached the concrete wall placed in front of her, it cut through it like a warm knife through butter and easily cut the wall. The red light created through magic was a laser beam made up of a single wavelength.

"Fu, fufufu, fufufufu! I see... so that's it! Fufufufu, that woman, Kiriha, was right! We were sheltered girls unaware of the world around us!"

Having obtained knowledge, she had gained this new magic. A logical and scientific type of magic built on the basis of proper knowledge. It was a next generation magic you might call scientific magic.

"But with this, I can win!! As long as I have this power!! Kurano Kiriha, Satomi Koutarou and Rainbow Yurika! Brace yourselves!!"

Scientific magic wasn't just lasers either. Theoretically it should be applicable to a lot of the current magic. Explosions, barriers, information collection, there were countless of spells that could be improved. Several months after her defeat, Crimson couldn't suppress her excitement as revenge drew ever closer.

Afterword

Long time no see everyone, it's the author Takehaya. But since I wrote a novel as a bonus for the recently released blu-ray, it may have only been a few days for some of you.

About the anime, if everything progresses smoothly this volume should be released around the time the final episode is about to air. As those of who have been watching might know, the anime is focused around the pillar of this series. Skimping on this part would only harm the important scenes. For example Koutarou rejecting Alaia's invitation.

The time leap was actually one of the things I was the most careful with. For example, if the series had started at 7.5, Koutarou would have no reason to return to his own world. That's because Koutarou would only have bonds with the characters of the past. Even if Koutarou returned because of a forcibly contrived reason, the readers would probably feel like something was off. Moreover, with no reason to return, the last scene in 8.5 wouldn't be established. It would have been a more vague.

So in the end, I decided to take the roundabout way, one step at a time. That meant doing volumes 1 through 7. The most important part was creating a story where Koutarou would choose to return to his own life.

I am very satisfied that the anime was able to portray that. All that's left is pray for a second season, lol.

I shouldn't just talk about the anime, I feel like I should touch on the content of volume 17 as well.

This volume was a bunch of mini episodes with the invaders, with Koutarou as the main focus. And Koutarou's father appeared for the first time in a while (Since the first volume!). The Satomi family's problems are brought into light. Stuff like this can't be done when some major event is occurring, so it can only be shown at times like these. But maybe I should do one more? Maybe?

With this volume we got some story on the Satomi family's and I believe we got a vague look into the future. Please watch over Koutarou and the invader girls overcome their trials.

Normally the afterword would end around here, but this time it's twice as long as normal. I'll have to write a little more, so I'll write about my recent situation that I usually tend to omit out of convenience.

Around the end of august I visited Sasuke Park. The athletic park where you wear some safety gear and play your heart out just like on the show. After giving all of the stages a shot, I've come to the conclusion that I can't laugh at people who fall off the stepping stone or fail the long jump anymore.

After experiencing it for myself, I realized that all areas requires you to be able to jump a long distance. Even the stepping stones that look like they're not far apart have quite a distance between them. As a result, I now know why people on the show fall on places I couldn't understand before. Surprisingly, the arm strength focused area was surprisingly easy.

The impressions I got from watching the show and the impression I got from trying it myself were completely opposite, and I realized that this must be what preconception is like. Whenever I watch the show from now on, I'll be able to enjoy it in a different way.

I've also started on a new hobby, so I'm now working towards taking a motorcycle driver license. I think I'll be able to get it before it gets cold. I've already bought a helmet, so I can't back away now. I don't intend to be very adventurous when I chose the model of my bike. I'll leave the special stuff for later and just focus on the basics for now.

I feel like I've been able to fill up the space well, and since this is a good spot, I'll end it here. As always I'd like to finish with my normal greetings. I would like to thank the editorial department for helping me with my work and the making of the anime, the animation studio and the voice actors, Poco-san who always draws me cute pictures and finally to all of my readers who bought this book.

Then let us meet again in the afterword of volume 18.

September, 2014 Takehaya

ころな陸戦規定

NEW! 2010/9/6

第二十条
　ころな陸戦条約に批准した者は、原則的に里見雄一郎（ころな陸戦条約批准者・里見孝太郎の親権者）を実の父親として扱うものとする。

第二十条補足
　絶対その方がいいと思うのよ！　いろんな意味で！